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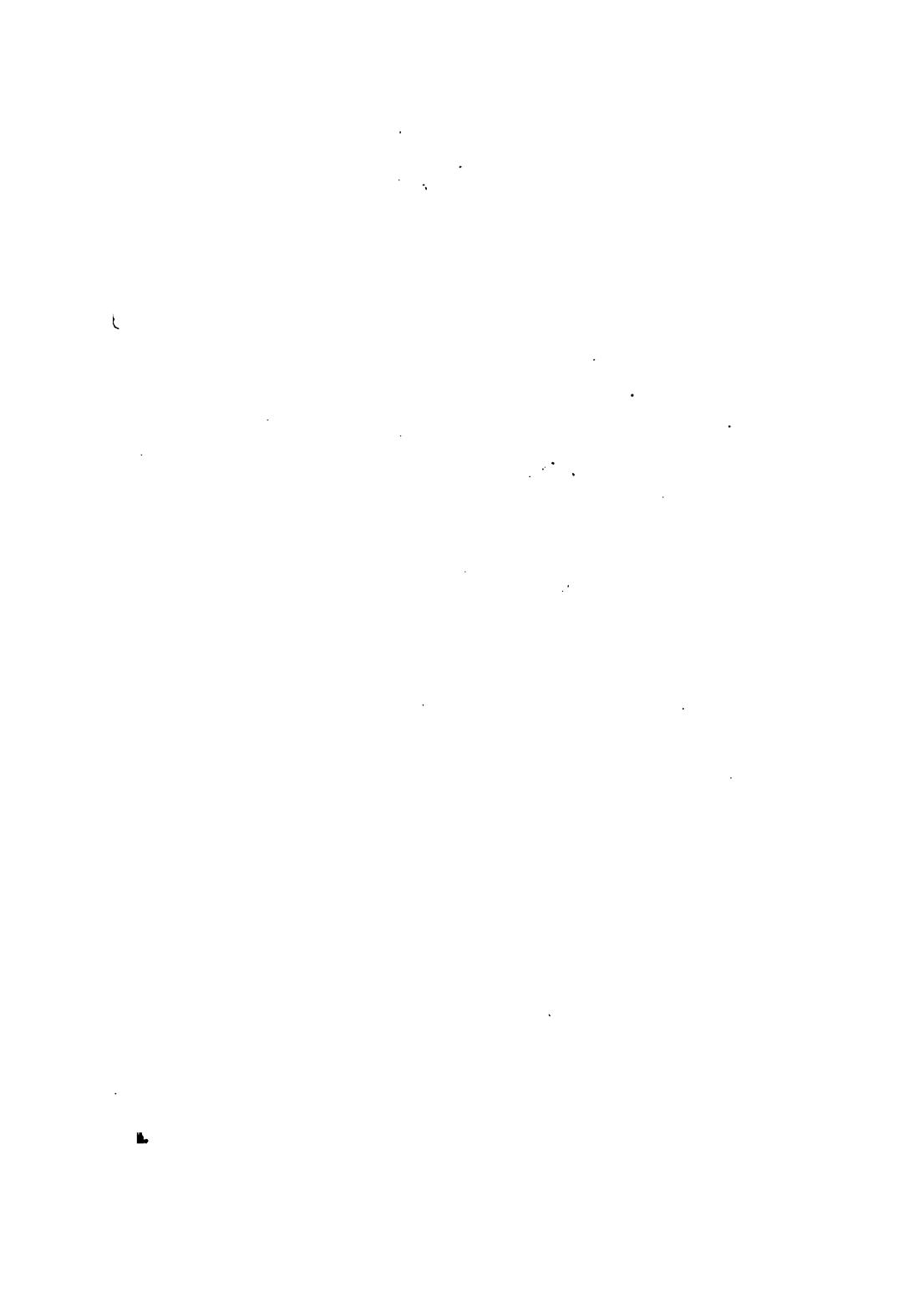




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HER MOTHER'S DARLING.



HER MOTHER'S DARLING.

A Novel.

BY

MRS. J. H. RIDDELL,

AUTHOR OF

"GEORGE GEITH," "TOO MUCH ALONE," "HOME, SWEET HOME,"
"THE EARL'S PROMISE," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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LITTLE QUEEN STREET, LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS.

TO
ELIZA CHARLOTTE, HARRIETTE LOIS,
AND
CONSTANCE MARGARET GREENE,
THIS STORY OF A YOUNG GIRL'S LIFE
WHICH,
FROM SYMPATHY, WILL HAVE AN INTEREST FOR THEM
OUTSIDE THEIR OWN HAPPIER EXPERIENCE,
IS,
IN REMEMBRANCE OF MANY A LOVING WORD
AND KINDLY TOKEN,
Dedicated
BY THEIR ATTACHED COUSIN,
THE AUTHOR.

Weybridge, January, 1877.



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HER MOTHER'S DARLING.

CHAPTER I.

HONORIA.

MANY years ago a mother and daughter sat in a room overlooking the sea ; discussing ways and means.

It was a glorious day in the early summer-time : without, there lay a glory of sunshine over land and water ; within, a perfume, composed of the scents of various flowers, pervaded the house.

Through the open windows and the closed Venetian blinds came the hum of bees, the fragrance of new-mown hay, the essences of hundreds of roses, distilled

by the sweet west wind that came wandering into the room, spite of the tangle of jessamine and sweet-briar, honeysuckle and passion-flower, which hung in festoons of mingled greenery and blossom across the casements and about the house.

“A sweet Home.” So many a tourist, pausing to look over the garden-hedge, whispered to himself: and it was a sweet home in the bright summer weather, when the sea lay like a mirror reflecting back the blue sky, just flecked by fleecy clouds; when the white-winged vessels in the offing sailed smoothly over the tranquil waters, slow and conscious like stately swans; when the little enclosure in front of the house was all ablaze with flowers, and peace and rest and beauty pervaded the landscape.

But it was a somewhat eerie home when the dark days came upon the earth, when the sea either lay grey and sullen

under a dull November sky, or lashed itself to madness whilst driven hither and thither by the hurrying wind, when storm-tossed vessels fought an unequal fight against the fury of the elements, and signals of distress told those on shore their help was needed in a battle raging at that minute among the white-topped billows.

Not a sweet home, that cottage perched above the sea, when the winter storms raved and the gulls flew inland, when the wind tore at the casements and wandered round the house as if seeking some point at which to enter, when long blasts swept over the ocean coming nearer and nearer from remote distances, and then, as they approached the land, seemed to join together for one final effort of destruction, to compass which they took the waves in their hands and dashed them against the rocks with a noise like thunder.

There was not a phase of nature as she appeared on that deceitful coast unfamiliar to the dwellers in Antlet Cottage, as their home was called. For ten summers and winters they had studied her in calm and tempest, in hail, rain, shine. They had seen the sea so calm that the children could sail their toy boats upon it, and they had beheld it so rough that not the best vessel which ever left harbour could approach the land and live.

Ten years—a short time to look back upon in the experience of some people—but a long time to the mother and daughter who sat discussing ways and means in the cheerful sunny drawing-room overlooking the sea.

To the mother, long, because no hope had brightened their passage; no excitement, whether pleasant or the reverse, relieved the tedium of a most monotonous life. To the daughter, long, because, to

the imagination of youth, days are weeks, and months, years. And she had but just turned seven when her parents removed to the Cottage. By a natural consequence, she was when first introduced to the reader, journeying from the frontier lands of sweet seventeen to take possession of the estates upon which eighteen enters with greater gravity.

Not a beautiful girl. It had never occurred to any human being, not even to her mother, to think of Honoria Legerton as beautiful; neither was she pretty nor handsome, for both these words mean a certain style of feature or make up of face, to which Honoria had no pretension.

And yet there was something about the girl which gave promise of future rank amongst earth's fair women. Already her face was attractive and lovable. Mrs. Legerton thought it the sweetest she had ever seen, but then Honoria was an only

daughter—an only child; and she and her mother had been together ever since she was born, and the mother understanding the child's face, loved it, as insensibly we grow to understand and love some picture, poor enough to other eyes, which has hung on the walls of our homes and borne us company through weal and woe.

"It seems a shame to ask poor papa for more money," said the girl in continuation of the pecuniary subject; "and yet what can we do? I often wish we had refused the Lessants' invitation, and yet I do long to go out and see the world."

So quietly had they lived that this girl conceived paying a visit to a family residing near a stupid provincial town would enable her to see the world; whilst the mother, whose knowledge of life was almost as limited as that of her own child, found nothing even to smile at in the remark.

"You must try to recollect that they like their name pronounced Le Saint," she said in her soft even voice.

"It is so ridiculous," expostulated the daughter. "Fancy calling ourselves 'Le Gerton.'"

"There is no use in running counter to the prejudices of our friends, even if they seem to be ridiculous," remarked Mrs. Legerton.

"Mother mine," began Honoria after an instant's pause, "what sort of woman is Mrs. Le Saint? I have seen one of the daughters, but I have never seen her."

"And it is so long since I have seen her," answered Mrs. Legerton, "that I think you had better find out what she is like for yourself. We all change so much with years, that I dare say she does not in the least resemble the Theresa Jersey of my girlhood."

"I do not believe that people change," said the young lady briskly.

"You are scarcely old enough to be able to form any accurate opinion on the subject," was the reply. "But possibly I employed a wrong expression. We develope, or modify rather, perhaps, than absolutely change."

"Mamma, you do not like Mrs. Le Saint," remarked Honoria, who understood the meaning of every tone in her mother's voice.

Mrs. Legerton coloured a little—there are some women who blush to the last hour of their lives—and answered,

"My dear, how you do rush to conclusions! Why should you suppose I dislike Mrs. Le Saint. She was one of my dearest friends when I was young. I think there never were two girls so inseparable; and if the intimacy has been less close since her marriage, it is only because we

both found other interests, and began walking along different roads that have led us far asunder."

"She is a great deal older than you?"
This was interrogative.

"Ten years; but I do not think that is a matter she would care to have mentioned."

"But any one can see her daughter is years older than I am."

"Yes, but if a woman has married very young, of course that makes a difference."

"And did she marry very young?"

"You should not ask so many questions, Honie," observed Mrs. Legerton; "as I have said before, when you have been a few hours in her house, you will know far more about Mrs. Lessant than I could tell you in a year."

"That is, if I ever get to her house. Just now there does not appear much likelihood of my doing so, when I want every-

thing from boots to a bonnet. Money seems to make wings for itself. I am sure I thought the ten pounds papa gave us would have bought all we wanted, and left enough for travelling besides."

"So did I," sighed Mrs. Legerton.

"Ten pounds, I suppose, seems a mere trifle to Mrs. Lessant?"

"Not as much as five shillings seems to us."

"Mamma, I think I will give up the idea of going. We can't ask papa for any more money; and if we could, I do not feel as if it would be right to spend it. You shall tell me about Mrs. Lessant, and we can imagine what I should have done and seen had I gone to stay at The Manor House; and it will be just as good, perhaps better."

And the speaker looked bravely in her mother's face, though her lips trembled a little as she spoke.

She was so young for her years. She had seen so little, and the life opening before her seemed so irrepressibly beautiful that it was hard to give it all up. Though she did give it up with the courage which even quite a tiny child can evince on occasion, when relinquishing something very dear to it at the asking of the person it loves best.

"My darling," said the mother, "we need not trouble your father, and there is no necessity for you to give up your visit; when it was decided you were going to Dilfield, I chanced to be writing to Mrs. Verbeke and mentioned the fact. She knew Mrs. Lessant well in days gone by. I had a letter from her this morning, and in it she encloses a banker's draft for twenty pounds, which she hopes I will expend in a pretty dress for her goddaughter."

There was a dead pause—an awful silence.

Then Honoria broke out passionately, "No, a thousand times no. If I never went from home—if I stayed here the whole of my life—I would not take money from a person who—"

"Hush, dear," said her mother. "You know nothing about Mrs. Verbeke, who, in spite of all her eccentricities, is as good a woman as ever breathed. If she has her weak points, she has her strong ones too. Now that she understands many things which once she failed to comprehend, she is anxious to make amends, and it is not for my child to reject the olive branch held out by my oldest and dearest friend."

"I cannot accept alms from any one," said Honoria.

"My dear, this is the silliest talk. Have I ever asked you to accept alms? Am I in the habit of asking for charity? Cannot you trust your mother, Honoria? Do you think for the sake of any possible gratifi-

cation you could enjoy, I would place you for a moment in a false position? There are occasions, love, when it is quite as graceful and gracious to receive as to give, and this is one of them. How could the world go on if we were always standing on our dignity? But read your godmother's letter for yourself, and decide for yourself. After all, this visit, which may prove the turning-point of your life, has less, far, far less to do with me than with my sometimes unreasonable daughter."

She was the sweetest woman who, having married a presumably wealthy man, was ever called upon to endure poverty. She had that charm of voice and word and manner which is so fast vanishing from amongst us; and as she stooped over her daughter and, whilst putting the letter into her hand, kissed her, the girl rose and, flinging her arms round her mother's neck, cried,

"You are right; you are always right.

Forgive me. I do not want to read what Mrs. Verbeke says. If you think we ought to take her money, let us keep it."

" Still read," urged Mrs. Legerton, and thus entreated, Honoria took the letter.

" My dearest Marion," so the close and clearly written epistle commenced.

" It is like the Marion Jersey of old to let byegones be byegones, and to make excuses for a mistaken friend rather than pile reproaches on her head. All you say is true. Had I been aware of your real position—which, as I said in my last letter, I never was till I met Mr. Danvers—I should not have misunderstood your conduct. It was impossible for you to act differently. I see that clearly, and I cried like an old idiot over your letter which revealed to me what you must have suffered through the supposed coldness of those who were your warmest friends. Oh ! Marion,

had I known while still much was in my power, how differently I could have acted ! Once it was in my power to do something for those I loved ; now I am only a poor old annuitant.

“ Oh ! that is ungrateful to the kind nephew and the dearer niece by marriage, who humours all the whims of a cross and disappointed woman.

“ Indeed I am very happy, especially happy after reading your letter, and knowing you are so blessed in your only child.

“ And so, she is going to stay with the Lessants. What could have possessed Theresa to ask a young girl to her house ?

“ The mystery will solve itself in time, but at present I confess myself at sea. That there is some *arrière pensée* we may be quite certain. Never since she was out of her nurse’s arms did your dear cousin—by the way, is she a cousin?—ever speak a word which did not conceal a second meaning.

"However, she is—in her rank—a fashionable woman, and her husband's house is a desirable one for your daughter to stay in. But don't let the child go there in all the sweet simplicity which is considered the proper attire for innocent seventeen. Prank her out, an' ye love me. Give her *one* pretty dress at all events. I enclose a little draft which will help to replenish her wardrobe.

"I know she hates her godmother, and perhaps with reason, but please tell her, fairy godmothers disappeared when Cinderella married the prince. We cannot now make coaches out of pumpkins and furnish young ladies with glass slippers, even of the smallest size; but we can hope and pray that they may make of life a happier and better thing than we have done, and wish they may enjoy all the peace and blessedness we have somehow missed.

“ God bless you ‘ stately Marion.’—Have you forgotten your old name ?

“ Tell your child not to put the bank bill in the fire, but to believe you are both loved most truly,

“ By your attached,

H. VERBEKE.”

To the very last word Honoria read this letter conscientiously, then she said, with a pained and puzzled manner,

“ Mamma, has your life not been happy ?”

“ Happy ! ” repeated the elder woman—” Of course—have I not had you ? ”

“ And papa ? ” suggested the girl softly, against whose feelings her mother’s words grated, though she was too young to understand all a woman means when she says she has been happy—in her child.

“ Some day, Honoria, you will be glad

to remember that no husband and wife were ever more united than your father and I," answered Mrs. Legerton, replying rather to her daughter's thought than to her question.

But there was a patient expression about her tone which—recalling to the girl's memory many a self-denial, many a bitter trial, many a solitary hour, her mother had endured and passed in silence—made her cry out,

"Oh ! mamma, I shall never be like you. Never, if I live to be a thousand—"

"I hope you will live to be a much more capable woman than I ever was, darling," said Mrs. Legerton. "I was unfortunately educated. I did not learn many things which might have proved useful to me; but still I have tried to do my duty."

"And have done it," murmured Honoria; but even she never understood how thoroughly.

This was the story the girl failed to grasp fully.

Separated—by those wiles which generally, because of that distrust love engenders, prove successful—from the man she should have married, there came to Marion Jersey a suitor—young, handsome, rich, of family better than her own.

She was cold, and he eager. She had outlived her life; he believed a marriage with her would prove the commencement of an existence almost too perfect for mundane creatures. Her father had run through his patrimony; her brothers had died abroad, seeking the fortune which in this world never was accorded to them. Her mother was ailing, and anxious to see Marion “settled;” her relations, wealthy and worldly, supposed she “never would be so mad as to refuse Audley Legerton’s offer.”

And she was not so mad. She told him

what had been ; he vowed if she would marry him he would ere long win her love ; and so, with a sigh given to the past, she turned to face the future, hand-in-hand with the handsome southern squire.

Her father was overjoyed, and her mother thankful. The rich relations came to the marriage, and sent their beautiful Marion wedding gifts of a quite unnecessary value. Shortly after the marriage her father died, and then her mother went to Antlet Hall and lived with Marion for three years, when she too, happily for her, was summoned to a world where we may humbly hope pecuniary troubles are unknown.

Four years more past, and then the storm so long impending broke over the house of the ancient Legertons.

When its fury was spent, and the husband and wife understood their actual position, they found themselves as nearly penniless as gentlefolks can ever be.

They had to leave the hall ; the estate passed into the hands of strangers. Of the furniture they were merely, through the kindness of creditors, suffered to retain enough, to furnish Antlet Cottage, secured to them for Mr. Legerton's life by the forethought of a friend ; and then they must have starved had not the same friend, possessing some interest with a neighbouring lord, presented Mr. Legerton's hard case in such eloquent terms to his noble neighbour that incontinently the marquis, then in want of an agent, turned over the management of his estates to the quondam owner of Antlet, and, I am bound to say, never repented of his precipitancy.

For Mr. Legerton—if he had no other great virtue—was honest, and served his employer to the best of his ability and his knowledge. If there were matters of which he was so utterly ignorant that unscrupulous

people traded on his incapacity, and through him robbed the marquis, yet the man's own integrity, which scorned percentages, commissions, bribes, and any underhand mode of increasing his salary, always at the end of the year put accounts very much to the right side, and for ten years he had managed to retain the confidence both of landlord and tenants.

Even the underlings on the estate, whose perquisites he reduced to a minimum, and who consequently might have been supposed inimical to him, found very little to say in his dispraise, while the family solicitors marvelled how he managed to settle so many disputes without bringing them into court, and why it was that voters were so much more easily influenced than formerly.

It was all owing to Mr. Legerton, who was no man's enemy but his own—the “own” including, and particularly referring to, his wife and child.

"There never was a fairer dealing agent," said the farmers admiringly, even after he had worsted them in some attempt to impose on his employer, and this was true as regarded the outside world; at home there never was a man who considered fair dealing so little.

With him, indeed, the shoemaker's wife went barefoot, and the blacksmith's mare unshod. Except a mere trifle for house-keeping, Mrs. Legerton never received a penny of her husband's not unhandsome salary. The less a woman asks from a man, the less as a rule she will get, and Mrs. Legerton proved no exception to that rule.

The squire, as he was still called, had a fixed idea that his womenkind could live on next to nothing; staying at home as they did, no necessity for spending money could arise; so out of the sums he eked out carefully and reluctantly, Mrs. Legerton provided for her household as best she

could, and never complained of the stringent economy she was obliged to practise. Fully Mr. Legerton had never won her heart; perhaps for the simple reason that he had never tried to do so.

Debts and duns and mortgages usually prove formidable rivals to Cupid; and even had this not been so, the squire, when once he secured his wife, was just of that facile disposition which takes for granted that of course he had secured her heart as well.

His was a happy nature; capable of forgetting everything he wished to forget—of remembering nothing except what was desirable. If you think of it, my reader, it is the affairs in which a man is interested that make an impression on his memory, not those which interest another person; and I am not aware that Mr. Legerton violated any law of ethics when, having discovered that his wife was everything he could desire, he omitted to ask himself

whether he was anything in the slightest degree approaching what she could wish.

At all events, he did not ask himself any question of the kind. He did not grumble at his reverses, which, indeed, were as much of his own causing as of those of his father before him, and he considered it quite a matter of course that his wife should not grumble either. He never considered how different her position was from his ; of the revenues of Antlet she had never been a partaker.

Mortgaged and squandered by one Legerton after another—for, however diverse in most respects, ancestors and descendants had all agreed in the desirability of making ducks and drakes of the goodly acres—those revenues were almost reduced to *nil* when the last Legerton took home his bride ; and from the hour of her marriage “stately Marion,” as her friends had delighted to call her, was forced to bow her head under

the yoke of debt, till she exchanged that yoke for—poverty.

But the poverty was preferable to the debt ; and when finally Antlet was left behind, the familiar threshold crossed for ever, the splendid rooms abandoned to the occupancy of fresh comers, Mrs. Legerton felt the change a relief. It was pleasant to experience no dread of to-morrow's dawn, of what the next post might bring, to be free from threats and anxiety, to be able to close the door of a house no man could enter without permission.

She had a hope for the future then also. Her husband, knowing the amount of his income, would manage it to the best advantage ; and if their means were limited, still they were far removed from want. They could live very comfortably, and they might still be very happy.

Such was her dream, which in less than three months the chill winds of experience

dispelled. At Antlet Hall she had pitied her husband; at Antlet Cottage she understood him. Let who would pinch, let who would economize, Charles Legerton never thought of following suit.

From time immemorial, though the Legertons could not close their purses against creditors and themselves, they were resolute in preventing wives and children from thrusting in their fingers. Thus the wives were broken down, and the children taught to be spendthrifts when, in good course of time, successive Legertons were carried to the family vault.

In the golden summer-time when Antlet Hall fell into possession of the new owner, it had troubled her to look from her eyrie above the sea inland over the waving woods and broad meadows and gentle uplands of the Legertons' former home. Her heart was full of pity for the man who having owned had lost; and she was wont when the early sun-

shine touched the tops of the stately trees, or when moonlight lay silver and clear over the lands Mr. Legerton might never again possess, to look at trees and park, at wood and plantation and glittering river, till tears blinded her—tears for the man her woman's fancy, if not her woman's love, had idealized into a martyr, suffering not for his own sins but for the sins of those who preceded him.

Then was his opportunity—then the possible turning-point of his life. If a woman's heart be worth having, he could have had the blessing in those early days when they were both commencing existence anew; but of this fact Charles Legerton was either ignorant or careless, and accordingly at Antlet Cottage he led much the same sort of life as he lived at Antlet Hall, with this difference, that he could not spend his substance recklessly.

The lands were gone, the estates had

passed away to strangers ; nor Jew nor Christian fought for the least morsel of the Legerton carcase now.

It was all gone—all swallowed up ; the ruin had been wrought—the vultures were departed, and Mr. Legerton, relieved from fear if also from responsibility, rode through the familiar scenes, lighter-hearted than he had ever before been, since he entered into possession of the estate of manhood and of debt.

He was popular, he had always been popular, he could sing a good song and tell a good story ; he could ride straight to hounds, and he was not afraid of any leap a horse could take. He was a handsome man and a gentlemanly. “He had,” so said the county, “borne his misfortunes bravely ;” and partly in recognition of his moral courage, partly by way of giving a slap in the face to the vulgar millionaire who had usurped Antlet Hall, by foreclosing

mortgages for which he could not get one penny of interest, the county held out its hand to Mr. Legerton and turned its back on Mr. Thomas.

Mr. Thomas could not ride, scarcely knew a thoroughbred from a screw ; understood nothing about crops, cared very little about politics, save that he had a commercial leaning towards the Liberals as being always averse to war ; was, so far as he was anything in religion, a Dissenter ; objected to the expense of preserving his game ; said openly that he considered county society more trouble than profit, and for that reason refused to subscribe to the local charities. He did not even profess an affection for fat pigs, believing pork to be a most indigestible food, while he hated dogs to such an extent that he would not have one about the hall.

“Why the ——” queried the county, “does not the old hypochondriac go back

to his beloved city and take his money bags with him—what right has such a cad to live in a gentleman's house?"

To which question Mr. Legerton, to whom it was often put, merely answered,

"That the man had bought Antlet Hall, and could, he presumed, do what he liked with his own."

Had any one in whose veins blue blood flowed stepped in as purchaser and resident owner, Mr. Legerton might have found his position altered, and not for the better; but, as matters stood, never did he find old friends so kind nor acquaintances so cordial as when driven forth from Antlet Hall he took up his abode at Antlet Cottage.

He was always out; his agency as may well be imagined did not occupy a third of his time, and the remaining two-thirds save a small portion devoted to sleep, he spent in dining here and lunching there; in finding

a weight-carrying hunter for this friend, and taking a short cruise in his new yacht with another; in representing his employer at the local balls, in attending public meetings, in making speeches at agricultural dinners, in carrying a cheerful face and a genial manner everywhere, and in proving himself to be one of the most contented and elastic of created beings.

"What a pity Mrs. Legerton will not visit!" remarked a young married lady one day to an experienced friend. "I am told she is quite as charming as her husband."

"Quite, my dear, but she is very wise; as matters are, he can go about *en garçon* and no one expects any return. If she visited, of course they must invite people back again, or else sink into the position of mere dependents. Mrs. Legerton is a most wise, as well as most devoted wife."

That was the world's verdict; and if Mrs.

Legerton had cared about the world, it should have satisfied her.

But, then, Mrs. Legerton did not care about the world; indeed, she cared about it so little that she had years before dropped voluntarily out of her own old, set rather than allow her friends to suspect how Mr. Legerton was actually situated.

Loyal to death she was, and as is usual in such cases her king overlooked the services of his most devoted subject.

She could not bear that friends of hers should criticize her husband's so-called reverses, that they should condole with her over his ruin; and accordingly years before this story opens, Mrs. Legerton had of her own free will isolated herself from all former acquaintances.

Idle lay her own busy pen; empty the drawers and desk filled of old with letters. Had she died she could not more completely have ceased all communication

with a world that in the bright days departed had been sunshiny and pleasant; and it was only by chance gossip, by the words of mutual acquaintances, by the whispers that birds of the air seem to carry, that as time went on those who imagined “stately Marion” had made a great match, and grown proud and forgetful, came to understand she had married, as far as money went, very badly indeed; and that she had ceased to correspond with her old friends from motives of pride indeed, but only that pride which dreads the humiliation of being pitied. Had her old friends seen Marion Legerton *née Jersey* when this light broke upon them, they would not have recognized her.

She had grown old,—not so much with years, as trouble,—not with sickness, but disappointment. Her thick black hair was streaked with white; her face lined and furrowed as the face of no middle-aged woman should be. Her figure, though stately

in its carriage, was no longer lithe and lissome ; her dress was that of quite an elderly lady ; and her depression touching, not because of any expression of melancholy which pervaded it, but rather because it was resigned and patient.

A face out of which the fire and the sparkle, and the light and the youth had died by no ordinary means ; a face that might well have brought tears into the eyes of any one accustomed to read the lore contained in human looks.

God is very good. Where a child was most wanted he had sent one. What Mrs. Legerton's life must have proved without her daughter, I fail to conceive. What they had been to each other through every changing scene, those only who have chanced to be so linked together can imagine. When the woman, once beautiful, who had grown old so prematurely, turned from her mirror with no wish to let her eyes rest on

what she beheld there ; she had but to look on her daughter, and, behold ! the hopes and the dreams and the ambitions of her youth were living passions once again.

For her there could be no future ; but for her child—her darling, her clever, sunny, impetuous darling—what good gifts might not be in store ? Her vitality, her superabundance of life, energy, imagination, and hope, sometimes made the cottage seem like an enchanted palace ; she was the one bright spot in Mrs. Legerton's life, otherwise of so uniform a grey,—the oasis in an existence from which other verdure had departed long before.

Though portionless, who could tell what marvellous gifts the gods might not have in store for her ? Though not beautiful, she possessed the power of winning love ; though not educated up to the standard attained by many young ladies of the present day, she was fairly accomplished, and

she possessed one great talent which circumstances, as well as inclination, prevented her hiding in a napkin. All she required, considered the fond mother, to make her perfect was that extremely prosaic accessory—a well-furnished wardrobe ; and, like a fairy godmother, Mrs. Verbeke had sent the means of providing that.

“ You will not refuse to make use of a gift so kindly offered,” said Mrs. Legerton after a pause, which Honoria occupied by looking dreamily out on the shimmering sea, while her thoughts travelled hither and thither, forward to Mrs. Lessant, backward to her mother’s youth, and then onward again, through the years that had passed since they left the Hall.

At her mother’s words she came back with a start to the day and the hour and position.

“ No, mamma ; oh ! no,” she answered, “ but it does seem hard—so hard.”



"It does, my dear," agreed Mrs. Leger-ton. There was no need for elaborate explanations of feeling between that mother and that child. "But you must not think of anything unpleasant; let us make out a list of what we require, and get the things at once. When it gets a little cooler, you had better walk to Frodsham and buy your dresses, at all events. Mrs. Perliss will get the order cashed for us if you leave it with her. Now, Honoria, what material should you prefer?"

"Let us see what we can afford, mam-mie," said Honoria, brightening up; and, leaning over her mother's chair, she watched the jottings of the busy pencil, and looked with something of sadness, for which she could have given no reason, at the white beautiful hands that were as great a source of pride and delight to her, as the tender, high-bred face no strangers ever saw without thinking, "How lovely that woman must have been when young!"

It was all decided at last. So much for travelling, servants, and incidental expenses ; so much for some little vanities and fripperies, hitherto resisted by mother and daughter ; so much for one very best dress ; so much for an every-day dinner dress ; so much for some fabric, very light and gauzy and pretty, fit for Honoria to wear at a ball, if she were so fortunate as to get the chance of going to one.

"Do you not think we had better defer buying that till I see whether there is any likelihood of there being a ball?" suggested Honoria, trembling with excitement at the bare idea of such happiness being in store for her. "It would be such a pity to spend money on a dress I might never be able to wear."

"There are certain to be dances," said Mrs. Legerton decidedly. "And now, dear, run upstairs and put on your bonnet, and see whether Mrs. Perliss has all we require,

as, otherwise, she will have to get the things for us, and we have not much time to spare."

"Not with all this finery to make up," laughed Honoria; and she was leaving the room when Mrs. Legerton exclaimed,

"Oh! here is Mr. Warren, Honoria; I do not think I should say anything before him about Mrs. Verbeke's letter."

"As if I ever said anything before him I could help saying!" pouted the girl, "and he shall not prevent my going to Frodsham. I shall put on my bonnet, and come in for the list, and go if fifty Mr. Warrens tried to prevent me."

"Oh! Honoria," expostulated Mrs. Legerton. But Honoria was out of ear-shot, and five minutes afterwards she reappeared, dressed for her expedition.

CHAPTER II.

MR. WARREN'S LITTLE MISTAKE.

"If you are going to Frodsham, I will walk with you part of the way," said Mr. Warren rising, as Honoria, purse in hand, and list in purse, was a short time afterwards crossing the room to bid him good-bye.

"But you have only just come, and you will be so tired," suggested Honoria, who had not anticipated this offer, than which none could have been more unwelcome.

"I am not at all tired, and I do not suppose I shall have many opportunities of seeing much of you for some months to come," he answered.

"But you say I always walk so fast."

"So you do; and I must therefore try to accommodate my pace to yours."

For an instant Honoria remained silent, marvelling if there were no other excuse she could offer, or if, on the whole, it would not be better to say her business could wait until the next day; but, happening to look at her mother, she saw a little pucker, denoting uneasiness, on her forehead, and an anxious expression in her eyes, sufficient to tell her to drop the discussion, even had Mrs. Legerton's voice not seconded her glance.

"It is very kind of Mr. Warren to offer to go with you, Honoria," she said, "and I only hope he may induce you to walk at a reasonable pace."

"Very well, mamma; if you look out of the window, you will see us proceeding as if we were chief mourners at a snail's funeral. Now, Mr. Warren, shall we start?"

And turning, while he opened the hall-

door, she gave a quick little nod, which Mrs. Legerton understood to mean that she would be careful both in what she said and what she left unsaid while talking to her unwelcome companion.

"It is such a shame," she thought to herself, as she opened her parasol and held it dexterously between Mr. Warren and her own face; "if I must marry him some day, surely he might leave me in peace while I am single. But I won't marry him,—no, not if—"

"And so, Honoria," remarked Mr. Warren at this juncture, changing his position and bringing himself on the sunless side of perverse Miss Legerton, "you are really going to Dilfield?"

"Why, that was settled long since," she answered in some surprise.

"So you told me; but I thought something might perhaps occur to prevent your going, for all that."

"Nothing has occurred, and I earnestly trust nothing may occur," replied the girl.

"Have you set your heart so much on this visit?"

"Yes, my whole heart,—every bit of it."

"Why you can want to go amongst total strangers, it is beyond my imagination to conceive," he observed.

Honorina felt tempted to tell him she could readily believe that; but she remained discreetly silent.

"You will not be happy there," he went on; "the Lessants are, I understand, very wealthy, and—"

"We are very poor," she added, as he stopped and hesitated, "but I do not see why that should make me unhappy."

"You do not know the world."

"Not much of it, certainly; that is one reason why I want to go to Dilfield," said Honorina a little pertly.

"When you have been there for a short time, you will perhaps wish you had stayed at home."

"If I do, I can come back again."

"When I look at that lovely view," persisted Mr. Warren; "when I think of your quiet peaceful home, and your dear kind mother, I wonder—I really do—how you can wish to leave all in order to stay with people of whom you know nothing, and who live in one of the ugliest districts in the whole of England."

"Did you never wish to leave home for a time when,"—she nearly said "when you were young," but substituted, "when you were a boy," for the offensive word.

"I do not think I ever did," was the reply.

"How very odd!" ejaculated Honoria almost involuntarily.

"You see," he went on, with the simple good faith of a man who has always found

that his most trifling sayings and doings interested his domestic world, "from the time I was quite young I was always fond of rural pursuits. My home was a very happy one, as happy as yours ; and I liked the cattle, and the sowing and gathering of the crops, and other things of the same kind, in which you take no interest, Honoria," he added, a little wistfully.

She did not answer. But in this instance silence gave consent, and he knew it.

"I never was fond of gadding," continued Mr. Warren, serenely endeavouring to hold up his virtues in the best light. "I always thought there was no place like home, and I think so still. If I were married, my wife would never have to complain that I left her moping alone while I went abroad enjoying myself."

"How dreadful !" thought the girl, "to have a man always poking about the house." But again she possessed her soul in silence.

How often she had successfully interposed that proof-armour between herself and her lover, Mr. Warren remembered well.

"If you go to Dilfield," he began, after a pause, finding she was disposed to ignore both the subject of his marital perfections and the shot against Mr. Legerton's faults, "you will hear plenty of what you like best, I suppose."

"Compliments?" suggested Honoria interrogatively.

"I did not mean compliments, though I dare say there will be no lack of folly and flattery at Mrs. Lessant's. What I was referring to is music. And I do not know but that it is worse for a girl to take undue delight in singing and playing than in words and phrases which, however silly and senseless, have a natural charm for young ears."

"Mamma loves music too. She does not think there is anything wrong in my fondness for it."

"No; and she encourages that fondness, which is about the only foolish thing I ever knew her do, except one," he added *sotto voce*.

"My mother never did a foolish thing, Mr. Warren," said Honoria hotly.

"She did when she allowed you to be always with Mrs. Caruth, studying as you call it, singing outlandish songs, and spending half, more than half your time in learning what can never be of the least use to you. It would be all very well for a woman who meant to earn her living by teaching, or singing on the stage, but for you—"

"Perhaps I may be a professional singer one day myself," interrupted Honoria.

"Now God forbid!" he cried in so serious a tone that all mischief died out of the girl's heart, and she said as gravely as he could have desired,

"Why cannot we agree to differ, Mr. Warren? Why should you scold me

because I have a talent—I suppose I may call it a talent—which was born with me. I do not quarrel with you on account of your fondness for fat cattle. Why do you quarrel with me for liking Beethoven's symphonies better than the bleating of sheep or the lowing of oxen?"

"I do not want to quarrel with you," he answered. "But I take such an interest in your happiness that I cannot help speaking about things which may bring sorrow to you. If I saw even a stranger walking too near the edge of that cliff, do you suppose I should not warn him of his peril? and it seems to me you are walking on the very brink of a precipice. No good can come of singing and playing, and idle talk and senseless stories. You have not been like your old self, Honoria, since Mrs. Caruth came into the parish."

"I am not so young as I was then; I suppose that is about the root of the

difference. As at thirteen I did not care for dolls and playthings, so at eighteen I have outlived my liking for many things I enjoyed four years ago."

" You are not eighteen yet, Honoria."

" I am near enough eighteen to like the society of so clever a woman as Mrs. Caruth."

" I suppose she approves of this mad journey to Dilfield?"

" She thinks it will make a very pleasant change for me."

" I wonder you can bear to leave your mother, and she so lonely."

" She won't be lonely if she believes I am enjoying myself. Besides, I mean to write to her every day; and I shall bring back with me talk enough to last us the whole winter."

And as the girl spoke she looked so full of perfect confidence in her mother and herself that Mr. Warren felt, if he could only

have felt himself included in the “us” she mentioned, he must have condoned singing and playing and idle chatter on the spot.

“I hope you will not forget all your old friends,” he said, after a moment’s pause, during which his heart grew very sad and very tender.

“I am sure I shall not,” she answered eagerly.

Oh! if he would only go back to being an old friend, how she could like him.

How thankful she should feel to be able to think of him once again as she had thought of him in the past, before she understood that he wanted a great return for his friendship, that he desired to have all her life for his very own; her young life, which might be so beautiful, given him to cage in that sombre home lying under the shadow of the woods at Antlet.

One half of her wish to leave home had its origin in a wild desire to be free

for a time from a man who was continually visiting at the cottage, coming there at all hours and in all weathers, adding daily another stone to the cairn of obligation he had already piled upon the Legertons; always showing mother and daughter some little kindness, doing them some trifling service, hovering about the house like an accepted suitor, and yet deferring the hour of actual explanation which might have compelled a decision and ended one way or another a suspense which was wearing out Honoria's patience and ruining her temper.

"She is too young," was the reason Mr. Warren, in talking the matter over with himself, assigned for his reluctance to ask the all-important question, and, indeed, he had felt there was no cause for haste until a month previously.

Of eligible bachelors there were few in that part of the country, and those few

were either in too low a station for Honoria to think of, or else in too high a station to think of her.

As has been said, the girl was not possessed of sufficient beauty to warrant the idea that any stray lord or passing baronet would fall madly in love with her at first sight ; and amongst the few people she knew, and who liked her for something altogether independent of good looks, there was not a single man of whom even Mr. Warren could feel jealous.

As for tourists, artists, and so forth, plenty of whom in the season were to be met with on the cliffs or by the sea, they never cost Mr. Warren a single pang.

Honoria had been too well brought up to get into any entanglement with a stranger ; and if her elderly suitor were sure of nothing else on earth, he felt satisfied no word of love had ever been whispered in the girl's ear.

He would bide his time, and some day, when opportunity and circumstance were favourable, ask her to marry him.

"There was no cause for hurry," he had decided in his own leisurely fashion, and, indeed, so long as Honoria remained at Antlet Cottage, and Antlet Cottage remained what it was, no necessity for hurry existed.

When, however, Mr. Warren heard of the proposed visit to Dilfield, his heart misgave him, and he would immediately have spoken to the girl concerning his dearest desire but that a little consideration satisfied him there was slight reason for alarm.

In his own off-hand way Mr. Legerton had announced the fact.

"Honie is going for a couple of months to the Lessants. You saw one of the girls and the father when they were down here last year. Mrs. Lessant is a far-off cousin

of her mother; and it will do Honie good. People tell me they think she has been looking a trifle pale lately."

Mr. Warren stood for a moment utterly dumbfounded. So secure had he felt, that not even an idea of a check ever crossed his mind. What had been was to go on till he chose to alter the course of affairs, and now she was going away for the whole summer—strawberry season, haymaking, harvest,—and she would get to know other people, fashionable people—town people, who cared nothing about the country or country pursuits, and who in many respects would be more in unison with Honoria than his prim sister or his sober, steady-going self.

"Won't it cost a lot of money?" he asked bluntly. He was in the habit of expressing himself with charming freedom to all the Legertons, and more especially to Mr. Legerton.

"Oh! no," said that gentleman airily. "I have given her a ten-pound-note, and she and her mother are going to lay their heads together and make that amount do. Honoria, you know, is wonderfully clever with her needle. Bless you, she was down at Frodsham this morning almost as soon as Perliss's was open, and came back before breakfast, carrying a parcel almost as big as herself. I left her and her mother tearing up the calico, and Honie's tongue going nineteen to the dozen."

"Sarah," said Mr. Warren to his sister, when he returned home to partake of dinner, which at Antlet Farm was served about one o'clock. "Mr. Legerton tells me there is a talk of Honoria going to stay for three months with those Lessants, who stopped a night last summer at Frodsham. How much do you suppose it will cost them to send her there, outfit and all, I mean?"

"Fifty pounds," answered Miss Warren promptly.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Mr. Warren.

"It is sober sense," was the reply. "And I will prove it to you in black and white if you like. The girl has not had a new thing, except two or three print dresses, on her back since they left Antlet Hall. She has been wearing out her mother's gowns; and for under linen, I fancy one wardrobe has held both their clothes. She will need to be fitted out just as if she were going to be married, only the clothes must be better and more plentiful. She will want morning dresses and afternoon dresses and evening dresses, and silk stockings and white kid shoes, and mantles, and gloves, and dozens of little trifles that run into money, and then there will be the travelling and servants, and pocket-money while there. It will be a dear three months, I fancy; but Mrs. Leger-

ton would take her boots off, and walk bare-footed rather than deny Honoria her fancy."

"Let us hope, then, that Honoria may not take a fancy to her mother's boots," answered Mr. Warren. He knew his sister's prejudices pretty well, and so took her estimate of the probable cost of the girl's outfit *cum grano salis*, but he believed she was near enough the mark to relieve him of anxiety on the subject of the proposed visit.

It would be put off he felt assured, if not declined altogether, and during the course of the summer he could make his proposal.

That was his programme, which in a moment changed its aspect when Mrs. Legerton, sitting in her pretty drawing-room, said Honie was to start for Dilfield next Tuesday fortnight.

He must speak to her before she went. He would speak as they walked together towards Frodsham. He made up his mind on that point before he stepped from under

the rose-covered porch, and having so made up his mind, he at once began to find fault with her as was his pleasant way, and destroyed his opportunity of speaking about that which lay next his heart, while they walked over the cliffs and down the hill, and along the road skirting the woods of Antlet Hall, and on towards Frodsham.

"I will speak as we come back," he decided; and availing himself of the slight turn in his favour caused by his remark about old friends, he went on to say that he would call often at the cottage during her absence.

"It will be a busy time with me," he explained. "But I shall make leisure to see your mother almost every day, and hear all about what you are doing. And in the midst of all your gaiety you must spare a thought sometimes for me. There is no one, not even your mother, who will miss you so much as I."

The girl did not answer. She never helped him by the lightest word to utter what his heart longed to say, but her face looked sweet and tender in the softening evening light, and there was wistful outlook-ing in her eyes as if she saw dimly some-thing at a great distance which seemed to bring her life nearer to his just for that moment.

He walked on beside her to the High Street, where Perliss, draper and silk mercer, kept his shop. Or rather where Mrs. Perliss kept hers, for her husband had been dead so many years that the widow's weeds were almost forgotten memories, though she still wore a cap sacred to his memory, and the richest black silk money could procure, or affection suggest.

Honorina was not long in making her purchases. Weeks previously she had decided what she should like to have if she could afford to indulge her fancy, and now

there was little left to do save regard the beauties of the dresses once again, and desire that so many yards of each should be cut off and despatched to the cottage.

Greatly as Honoria desired Mr. Warren's absence, it was not in her nature to refrain from asking him if this colour was not pretty and that dress lovely, to which questions he answered, "Yes," in an absent and preoccupied manner, wondering all the while how the girl had got sufficient money to pay for what, unused as he was to shopping, seemed likely to mount up to a formidable sum.

Nor was his uneasiness decreased when, after the elderly shopman had received his instructions and laid the goods on one side, Honoria inquired if Mrs. Perliss was at home, adding that she wished to speak to her.

"This way, miss," said the man, lifting a flap in the counter and opening a door

leading into Mrs. Perliss' private sanc-tum.

Mr. Warren was following Honoria when she paused, and said with a little increase of colour,

"I shall not be a moment, Mr. Warren, will you wait for me please?" and so compelled him to remain in the shop.

"I could not have believed it," he con sidered. "Of all the women I ever met I thought Mrs. Legerton would be the last to run into debt. I should as soon have suspected Sarah. And all for what? Vanity and vexation! Ah! Sarah was right. We never know what any woman will do till she is tempted through her love for her children. Then the best and truest among them is not to be trusted."

Meanwhile the innocent cause of all this evil thinking as regards *le beau sexe* was, with a certain degree of pride and a certain degree of diffidence, laying her bank post

bill before Mrs. Perliss, and asking if she would be so good as to have it cashed the next time she or any of her people was going to the county town, and deduct the amount of the debt just incurred out of it.

"To be sure, to be sure," said portly prosperous, sympathetic Mrs. Perliss. "For that matter I will send up the change with the parcel to-morrow, but, dear miss, why does your mamma trouble about paying me now? I am not so short of money that I could not wait a year or even two if it was any convenience to Mrs. Legerton. Ah! in the good old days the Legertons were always kind friends and liberal landlords to me and mine, and never took a penny past this shop they could spend in it. Please God, it will all come right again some day, and we shall see you where you ought to be; but meanwhile it hurts me, miss, it really does, to think your mamma will

never let me book to the value even of five shillings."

"And do you know the reason, Mrs. Perliss?" said Honoria, her frank face a little flushed and her eyes a little dim with tears which came readily there, as they do generally when people are young and simple and unsophisticated. "If we did not pay you at once, we might never be able to pay you at all, and mamma would break her heart at having incurred a debt she was not able to discharge. We must wait till we are at the Hall again," added the girl with a forced laugh, "before we can afford to buy upon credit."

"And you are really going away, Miss Honoria?" said Mrs. Perliss, accepting the situation with that tact which had brought much business to the shop, and much prosperity to various members of her family.

"Really and truly," answered the girl.

"Well, I am glad of it. Mrs. Legerton will be lonely, but she will have to part with you some day and—"

"Never," interrupted Honoria; "nothing on earth will ever part my mother and me."

"Ah! Miss Honie, you say that now; but when Mr. Right comes, you will think differently."

"Not if fifty Mr. Rights came and fifty Mr. Wrongs at the back of them," retorted Honoria. "Paying a visit is one thing and marrying quite another."

"But the one often leads to the other, miss."

"It will not in my case," was the answer. "I do not think I shall ever marry, Mrs. Perliss, but, if ever I do, the fortunate individual will have to take my mother too."

"And your papa as well, miss?"

"Of course," said Honoria, laughing;

"and as I do not expect to meet with any one anxious to marry the three of us at once, I mean to remain single. Please, Mrs. Perliss, send up the parcel as early as possible to-morrow morning, or this evening if you can."

"It shall be at the cottage in an hour from this time, miss," answered Mrs. Perliss, smiling sympathetically as she looked in the girl's bright eager face. "And I hope you may enjoy your visit, and come back home well and happy."

"Thank you," said Honoria simply. "I dare say I shall be very glad to get home again, though I am very glad to go;" and as she spoke she moved towards the door, which Mrs. Perliss opened for her, and beheld standing on the other side of the counter Mr. Warren.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting," the girl apologized.

"Oh ! it is of no consequence," he

answered, looking, however, as if it were of great consequence.

"Well, times are changed," thought Mrs. Perliss, as she curtseyed somewhat stiffly to the owner of Antlet Farm. "I wonder Mrs. Legerton allows it. If Mr. Legerton knows no better, she should not let Miss Honoria go about with a man like that. Why, her grandfather would not have asked him to dinner. Ah! it is enough to make the Legertons turn in their coffins;" and Honoria and her squire having by this time departed, Mrs. Perliss relieved her mind by sharply telling her elderly assistant not to stand dawdling there, but to make up Mrs. Legerton's parcel and send it to the cottage directly.

"There is a note to go with it, and bring me the bill," she added in a tone which was neither soft nor pleasant; and then she shut her door with a little bang

which proved to Mr. Eldred that something had put the old lady out of temper.

Meanwhile Mr. Warren paced on beside Honoria, only answering her remarks in monosyllables, till they were almost out of the town, when he said suddenly,—

“I want to go back for a few minutes. Should you mind walking slowly for a little until I overtake you ?”

“Do not hurry on my account,” answered Honoria, secretly determining that she would be very near home before he overtook her.

“Thank you, I shall not be quarter of an hour,” he remarked, and went off as if walking for a wager.

It is a curious fact that people of very slow imaginations are wont to act far more rapidly than those whose thoughts travel more quickly ; and without the slightest consciousness that he was about to do a very rude and a very stupid act, Mr. Warren

hurried back to the shop he and Honoria had just left.

"By the bye," he said, addressing Mr. Eldred, "I think I had better settle that little account of Miss Legerton's now.

"Thank you, sir, I will tell Mrs. Perliss."

"Make haste, please," entreated Mr. Warren, pulling out his pocket-book in which lay some bank-notes he had received before starting for Antlet Cottage.

"Can I have Miss Legerton's bill," inquired Eldred meekly, opening the door of his mistress's sanctum. "Mr. Warren has called to pay it."

"Called to do what?" asked Mrs. Perliss, in a gradual *crescendo* of anger and astonishment.

"To pay Miss Legerton's account," repeated Eldred.

"Tell him the account is paid. I never heard of such impudence!" said Mrs.

Perliss, her face aflame with indignation. "Time enough for him to pay her debts when he has a right to do so, which I hope he never will have. I warrant he would not be so ready to put his hand in his pocket if she was his wife. Come to pay her account, indeed. I will speak to him myself," and pushing Eldred aside, Mrs. Perliss, dress flowing, cap-strings flying, sailed down the shop to where Mr. Warren stood, thinking he would tell Mrs. Legerton privately what he had done, after he had spoken about the other matter to Honoria.

"You have made some mistake, sir," said Mrs. Perliss breaking in upon his cogitations. "Miss Legerton has paid her account."

"Paid her account!" repeated Mr. Warren.

"Yes, sir. I was just writing out her receipt when you came in."

"I mean her account for the goods pur-

chased this evening," explained Mr. Warren.

"So do I, sir! Mrs. Legerton runs no bills," was the telling rejoinder.

"I am sure I am very sorry to have troubled you," said Mr. Warren, looking so crestfallen that Mrs. Perliss instantly recovered her temper and spirits.

"No trouble at all, sir," she answered graciously. "I am only sorry *you* have had so much;" whereupon Mr. Warren muttered,

"That does not signify," said good evening and left the shop.

"It will perhaps teach him to keep his fingers out of other people's pies," remarked Mrs. Perliss to Eldred, who, with a preternaturally solemn countenance, was tying up Honoria's parcel. "He has burnt them this time, or I am greatly deceived;" and radiant with smiles Mrs. Perliss returned to her parlour, unlocked her cash-

box, and counted out Mrs. Legerton's change, repeating to herself, "or I am greatly deceived."

She was not deceived. Never before in his life had Mr. Warren been so humiliated. Now, when too late to recall his act, he felt how utterly mad it had been.

He hated Mrs. Perliss when he remembered her smile of triumph. Even poor Mr. Eldred, who had looked so solemn throughout the transaction, came in for a full share of Mr. Warren's annoyance — nay, even the sight of Honoria herself, seated waiting for him on the further side of the stile over which those who went by the hill-path to the cottage had to climb, filled him with displeasure.

He knew as well as if she had told him, that she had got over unassisted, that he might not have the chance of clasping her hand. A little further on he had meant to

speak to her, but he could not do so now.

He felt as if the story of his intrusion and his rebuff must be written on his face for all the world to read ; and answered Honoria's little conversational efforts so shortly that she, having relinquished her idea of hurrying home as fast as she could, and waited for him greatly against her inclination, could only look at his moody face in amazement.

"I am afraid you walked too fast," she said at last, far more gently than was her wont when addressing him.

"I did walk fast," he answered, "but that is nothing. I have been balked and disappointed, but of course that is what I am accustomed to."

"I am very sorry," murmured Honoria, adding as he paused at the garden-gate to bid her good evening ; "surely you are not going away without a cup of tea ?"

"I cannot stop to-night," he answered, and went away down the hill not sulky but sorry, whilst Honoria with a sigh of thankfulness walked through the scent-laden garden and entered her home.

CHAPTER III.

A CHANCE ACQUAINTANCE.

“Now, Honoria, are you ready ?”

“In one moment, papa.”

“Don’t be all day, then ; you will be late for the train, and besides, I have an appointment with Gregory.”

It was Mr. Legerton who made this statement. Mr. Legerton standing beside a T.-cart, in the back of which Honoria’s modest complement of luggage was already stowed away. Over the curtain of her bedroom window his daughter’s head could be seen, and it was through the open casement that his words came wafted, together with the perfume of honeysuckle—a perfume that

in the after years always made Honoria feel sad and faint.

When starting from home Mr. Legerton was always in a hurry. His haste to leave could only be equalled by his tardiness about returning. The cottage was a place to sleep at, little more ; and had he been the merest lodger, his wife and child could not have seen less of him than was the case.

From the time she came down to breakfast he had not given his daughter one moment's rest, and now, when in a mad haste, she was tying the strings of her second-best bonnet and grappling with the difficulties of ribbons that would turn wrong side out, he kept up a running fire of command, entreaty, and expostulation.

“Remember we have six miles to go and I cannot drive very fast, as Belgium has been out at grass, and if you miss that train there will not be another till one, which stops at all stations. Do make haste,

Honie. We shall not start before twelve if you keep dawdling before your glass. Honoria, I really wish—”

“ Oh ! I am coming, papa,” cried the girl, catching up her gloves, keys, purse, handkerchief, cuffs, and thrusting all into her pocket together, and she ran down the stairs to the hall-door where Mrs. Legerton was vainly endeavouring to allay her husband’s impatience.

Then all at once it seemed to Honoria that she understood what she was doing, that she comprehended for the first time how utterly lonely her mother would be without her.

Something in the look in her mother’s face as she turned at the sound of her daughter’s footfall—something solitary about the stately quiet figure—something in the way the sunbeams fell upon the hair once black, now so streaked with grey—something in the beautiful patient eyes—in the

lines across her forehead touched Honoria's heart with a pain and a trouble she will never cease to remember till everything else is forgotten.

"Ready, darling?" asked the mother; "why, Honie dear, what is the matter?"

"I can't go, mamma—I can't go and leave you here all alone; I did not see it till this instant—I never thought—I never felt—"

And she clasped her arms round her mother's neck and sobbed aloud.

"What a baby my child is still!" said Mrs. Legerton, resolutely forcing back her own tears and conquering the choking in her throat which prevented her speaking quite steadily. "If you were not a year old, Honie, you could not be more foolish. Lonely indeed! What! do you suppose I cannot exist without you for a day? There, there, dear, your papa is getting impatient—and Belgium too. Good-bye, love. Enjoy yourself as much, and write to me as often

as you can. God bless you mine own.
Good-bye."

"Now, Honie, are you coming to-day, or are you not?" exclaimed Mr. Legerton at this juncture. "What! crying—nonsense. Don't waste time crying now; you will have a hundred miles for that. I declare I will not wait another minute. Marion, do make her come. That is right. Are you up. Keep your dress off the wheel. Just take the reins till I get round to the other side. I shall not be late, Marion, but you need not have any dinner prepared for me. Let go his head, Phil," and Belgium was off, carrying Honie and her fortunes into the world.

It was a lovely morning. For awhile their road skirted the cliffs, and Honoria through her tears saw the sea below lying calm as an inland lake, while the sun rippled and danced over its surface. Fast as Belgium's legs could go they were leav-

ing Antlet Hall with its waving woods and noble park and spreading uplands behind. Away to the left in a hollow, was peaceful, sleepy, kindly, gossiping Frodsham ; whilst before Honoria's eyes, as their way turned inland, spread a panorama of English scenery, fields and streams, farm-houses, corn-stacks and hayricks, cattle browsing, ducks paddling in muddy horse-ponds, everything looking home-like and pleasant and familiar ; not one strange thing in the whole landscape save the girl's own tear-stained face.

Meanwhile Mr. Legerton chattered on. His was a good even babble of talk which never rose either to wit or wisdom, or sank completely to utter drivvel. It was the ordinary talk one is doomed to hear most days of one's life when people consider it necessary to speak at all.

In the presence of his wife and daughter Mr. Legerton usually possessed his tongue in silence, having presumably wearied it in

the service of his male friends, but on that especial morning, being not wholly insensible to Honoria's little trouble and "Marion's" possible loneliness, he did his best to make things pleasant, and rattled on about Mrs. Lessant and Dilfield, Mr. Lessant and his daughters; a wonderful trout Gregory had landed, and a still more wonderful colt Gregory had bred. With his whip he pointed out various points of interest in the landscape. Notably, a double hedge where his lordship had come to sudden grief; a copse and a rivulet where Reynard had doubled and given the whole field the slip, by Jove, sir! a tract of waste land that, if he were possessed of the money, he would bring under cultivation, and thank no duke in the kingdom to be his father. All trifles, all the merest nothings, but sweet for Honoria to remember afterwards, when the dark hours came.

"You will write every day of course?"

he said as they neared Ripley Junction.
“We shall want to hear all about you, old woman.”

And he touched her soft young cheek with his left hand, and Honoria had much to do to keep from saying,

“Oh! papa, I love you; why cannot you be always like what you have been this morning?”

Those were remote days, reader, as time counts now, and Honoria called her male parent “papa,” which indeed always, spite of Mr. Trollope’s dictum, seemed to me a poor substitute for father.

Nevertheless, perhaps, a more endearing and respectful substitute than the Governor, or Pater.

With other times—other manners. Once father was good enough for all ranks and classes; now the word is relegated to the hewers of wood and drawers of water; and in place of the sentimental

papa and mamma, we have all manner of names which suggest the relationship without the affection—the ties of kindred without the feeling of respect or duty.

Hereafter, no doubt, we shall have “Our Lord’s Prayer” done into modern English, and one of the very few things I should care to live to see is how OUR FATHER will be rendered for the benefit of children yet unborn.

“There is the train, Honoria; not a minute to spare, you see,” said Mr. Leger-ton, pulling up Belgium all in a white heat at the entrance to the station. “Hi ! hi ! Ambrose, take this luggage, and get some fellow to hold my horse. Now, Honoria, left foot first, well done; never saw a girl who could get out of a dogcart better; that old Austrian empress, or whatever empress she may have been, that story-tellers talk about, should have seen you alight from our carriage. Put up

your purse, child; you will need all you have in it when you get to Lessant's. No, no, child, keep your little money; you have not had much to spend yet. Now, Wilkins, first class to Dilfield."

"All right, sir, change at Wrainton," and Wilkins banged down the ticket on the board while Honoria was saying this—

"You here, Mr. Warren!"

"Of course, I wanted to see you off."

All at once the sunshine faded out of the sky, and Honoria's face grew almost old and haggard in its expression.

"You are very kind," she said timidly.

"Only kind to myself," he answered, which was indeed quite true.

She had bade good-bye to him and his sister the previous day; and had said to herself as she parted from both of them,

"Thank goodness, I shall not see either of those good people again for some time." And now, behold, here was the brother at

all events come to remind her that there are some people, as there are some things, who can never be quite left behind, and whom one is often tempted to think will start up as inopportunely in eternity as they have done in time.

"Now, Honie, come along, take your seat; the train is going to start," said Mr. Legerton.

"Stops here twenty minutes, sir," explained the guard.

"Does it? thank you. Here is a good carriage, Honie; what! face to the engine? All right, if you prefer to sit that way, but you are more likely to catch cold. Don't forget to look after your luggage at Wrington. Good-bye, dear. Write as often as you can to your mamma; and if you want anything don't forget to ask for it."

"Oh! papa; please, papa, do not leave me till the train starts," entreated his daughter.

"Honoria, don't be unreasonable," said Mr. Legerton with amiable decision. "How can I meet Gregory and stay with you? Besides, Mr. Warren will remain, and what can you possibly want more? You must learn not to be such a little silly," continued the quondam owner of Antlet Hall. "You can't expect to be tied to your mother's apron-strings for ever."

"I beg your pardon, papa," answered Honoria humbly. "I am sorry to have been so foolish, only I thought, I imagined—"

"There, there, child, don't say another word about it. I know you did not mean to take up my time. What! another kiss. Well, good-bye, baby, and be sure to enjoy yourself."

"She would not be her father's daughter if she did not," commented Mr. Warren a little bitterly.

"No, I think not," said Mr. Legerton,

perfectly unconscious of the sarcasm. "I have had a great deal of trouble in my life; more I fancy than falls to the lot of most men, but I never could see the good of turning one's back to the sunshine on that account, eh, Honie?"

But Honie only answered with a faint smile. She knew then vaguely, though she never knew before, who had borne the burden of the heat and the cold—of the fearful reverses—of the long neglect—of the grinding, weary economy—of the loneliness and the monotony.

She was beginning to understand who had sat at home while another rode abroad, who had been a hermit while another feasted at great men's tables, who had been content with little while another spent much, who, standing in the shade, had worn a more cheerful face than he who was in comparative sunshine, who had fulfilled all duties beyond the letter

of their meaning, and made so much—ah ! so very much—better of the worse her marriage vows entailed upon her.

“I do not at all like the idea of your taking such a long journey by yourself,” said Mr. Warren, looking after Mr. Leger-ton’s retreating figure with an expression of amused contempt, which made Honoria feel less disposed towards him than ever; for if she were learning to understand her father’s shortcomings, it vexed her to find that any one else should understand them also. “I think it is not right for you to travel such a distance alone. I have a great mind to go as far as Wrainton Junction, at any rate, with you.”

“Oh! do not, please,” cried the girl; “no harm comes to nought, as Miss Warren often says. Nothing will happen to me—and—and—”

“Here is a seat, sir,” interposed the guard at this juncture, opening the carriage door,

and to Honoria's joy there entered an elderly man with umbrella, rug, cap, fishing-tackle, and shiny bag, who, after saying, "I suppose I can have my portmanteau inside," gave the guard a trifle *sub rosa*, and proceeded to settle himself and his belongings for a long journey.

Over Mr. Warren's face spread an expression of intense disgust as he watched these proceedings. Let him go to Wrainton or not, he still could have no chance of making that long-deferred proposal. If he knew anything of Honoria, and during the last few weeks he had begun to know a great deal, he was quite certain all the king's horses and all the king's men could not have induced her to move into another compartment. This chance, like many of its predecessors, was lost irretrievably.

Had he only been quick enough to think of tipping the guard at first, he might have secured a sixty-five miles *tête-à-tête*, but,

as matters stood, he might as well go back to his farm and his mowers—his sister and his herds and flocks—for all the good he was likely to compass by travelling either to Wrainton or Dilfield.

“I will go to see her while she is at the Lessants’,” he mentally decided. “She will be glad after a few weeks to see any home-face, and I shall be better able to spare the time a little later on.”

“If you feel at all lonely or nervous, Honie,” he continued aloud, “say the word and I will go with you; no,—then be sure and write to your mamma to-night. We shall all be anxious to hear of your safe arrival. Have you any message to the cottage? I shall call there on my way back. Do not trouble yourself about the horse. He will stand quiet enough, never fear, and I must see the last of you. If you ever have five minutes to spare send me a line, will you? I shall be as glad of it as your mamma. I

hope you will not be tired with your journey."

"Now, sir, are you going on?" inquired the guard coming in a great hurry along the platform. "Take your seats, please."

"Good-bye, Honie," said Mr. Warren with wistful tenderness, holding her hand in both of his.

"Good-bye," answered the girl thankfully. Never so glad a sound had her ear heard as the guard's whistle ringing out clear and shrill at that instant.

"Stand back there, stand back," cried one of the porters; then with ponderous dignity the engine puffed slowly out of the station, the connecting chains tightened with a clatter and hubbub, the guard, after waiting to the last second compatible with travelling by the train at all, executed a neat *pas seul* into his van, and Honoria was off.

For an instant Mr. Warren could see

the girl's face looking out of the window, and then that disappeared also. There was nothing more to wait for,—there was nothing to be beheld but the back of the last carriage, with its red lights, ready for the tunnels, shining like enormous bull's eyes. The train was gone, and Honoria with it, and Mr. Warren turned and went his way, feeling more sick at heart than he had ever done before in the whole course of his prosperous uneventful life.

Meanwhile, ungrateful Honoria could have sung for joy at being rid of her unloved lover. Had her elderly travelling companion been in any other compartment, no doubt her young feet would have danced from window to window in the exuberance of her delight.

We never know how great has been the incubus of any sorrow or anxiety till it is removed, and certainly Honoria never understood how much sunshine Mr. War-

ren had latterly taken out of her life till she left him behind her at Ripley.

What a lovely entrance into her new existence that journey seemed ! There were "birds on the tree and flowers on the lea," summer weather, a delicious breeze, green fields and hedges, quaint little country stations, and a pleasant companion, whose talk—though to her young eyes he seemed old as the hills—she enjoyed thoroughly.

What did they—two total strangers—find to talk about ? Everything that can be imagined. He had been away, he told her, for a month's holiday, and spoke freely of the places visited by him, and waxed eloquent about coast scenery, inland haunts, and streams dear to anglers. Now all the moods and tenses of coast scenery were as familiar to Honoria as the letters of the alphabet, and she was consequently able to cap his praises of the sea in its tranquil

humour with stories of raging billows and raving winds—of vessels in distress—of poor shipwrecked folk, and of unknown strangers washed in on the shore, and laid by unfamiliar hands in Antlet churchyard to sleep till eternity. Moreover, in all that regarded sea and river fishing, the girl was an expert; she knew how the men went out in the calm summer evenings, singing as they set their sails, and how also, when the dark nights came, and there was nor sun nor moon, and the winds adverse, they cast loose and rowed away, carrying their lives in their hand, knowing all the risk and all the danger, but still keeping a brave heart and a stout courage, as befits men who have to earn their living out of the deep.

In her own simple words—with her own eager tones—she managed somehow to hang a series of pictures before the mind's eye of her companion, though by birth and habit

he was a cockney who had little care for nature in her daily dress, and when not prankt out for the benefit of holiday-makers, whilst when he, taking up his parable, spoke of the rivers he had whipped, and the streams where trout were plentiful, he at once secured an interested and sympathetic auditor.

She knew all about the finny tribes that love to disport themselves in tranquil waters, and hide away in deep pools, and flash about among the pebbles and under the alder-trees ; from her childhood upwards she had heard learned talk concerning tackle and rods, and flies and bait and baskets, and could cap her companion's remarks with experiences gone through by her father and Mr. Gregory, and many another local follower of the "gentle craft."

"Upon my word," said the old gentleman at last, "it is not often one meets with a young lady so thoroughly at home in such

matters as you. Generally girls are brought up to take no real interest in anything; they are taught a little about drawing, which they forget a month after leaving school; a little French, which fails them if they ever want to speak that language; a little embroidery, which, unhappily, they are able to remember; a little music, enough to make life a weariness to any one who really loves the art. Even you, perhaps," he added slyly, with a glance at Honoria's deepening colour, "have been instructed in gamuts and scales and so forth, without learning even the nature of a chord as thoroughly as you have mastered the manners and habits of carp and trout."

"Very likely," was the answer; "the more I learn thorough-bass the less I feel I understand it, and that is such a pity, for I love music."

"Thorough-bass! good heavens!" ejaculated the stranger, "and, if not an imperti-

nent question, may I ask the name of your master ? ”

“ It is not a master or a mistress either,” said Honoria simply ; “ a friend—a lady—has taught me all I know about scientific music. She plays and sings beautifully ; even among professionals, I believe Mrs. Caruth was considered very clever.”

“ Mrs. Caruth ! you surely do not mean the widow of Professor Caruth ? ”

“ I do indeed.”

“ Why, I thought she had gone abroad.”

“ She did go abroad for a time after her husband’s death, but has now returned to England, and is living near us.”

“ Well, that is extraordinary,” observed the other ; “ I had lost sight of her for ten years. Ah ! hers was a sad story,—a wasted life. If she had gone on the stage she might have done anything she chose—anything ; with her voice, with her talent,

she could have climbed to any height. I knew her when she was not older than you are now,—when she had every gift a woman need desire, except wealth and beauty; she was a charming girl, and after her marriage what parties she used to give! There is hardly a person of that time famous in literature, science, or art I have not met at her house. What talk I have listened to there! ah! those were days! But, bah! how can the memories of a man nearing his dotage interest a young thing like you, whose life is all before instead of all behind? When you are my age you will know what that means, though you cannot understand it now."

"I think I can, a little," answered the girl; "but tell me, please, about the great people you remember, I never tire of hearing or reading about them. Mrs. Caruth talks of old times now and then, when we are walking by the sea-shore in the moon-

light, or sitting ‘between the lights,’ but not very often.”

“Ah! poor soul, no doubt,” exclaimed Honoria’s acquaintance. “Is she much changed,—but how should you know? Is she cheerful,—does she ever laugh? Is she still fond of music?”

“It is her greatest pleasure,” said the girl. “She will play to me for hours together, and, though she says her voice is gone, I think no one could sing more beautifully. I—I am with her part almost of every day,” went on Honoria timidly, “and she is generally cheerful, and often laughs; she is gayer than any one else I know.”

“And has her dark hours, no doubt, when you are *not* with her,” commented Mrs. Caruth’s former friend. “So, she teaches you. Well, you could scarcely have a better instructor; I begin to think,” he added with a smile, “you must

be almost as much at home amongst the giants of musical composition as among piscatory minnows."

"I wish I were," she answered; "but I have been hearing about minnows all my life, and very little about composers until Mrs. Caruth came to Sea View."

"And how long is that ago?"

"Two—nearly three years."

"And you called upon her immediately?"

"No; mamma never calls on any one—we live so quietly. But I got to know Mrs. Caruth; she spoke to me first one day when I was gathering some sea-weeds. Of course, I should not have ventured to speak to her, and then we met afterwards and talked—of—of different things; and when she found I loved music, she took me to her house, and played as I did not think any one could play."

"And then you played for her, I suppose?"

"Yes, she made me; and it was such a pleasure to touch her piano."

"You sing, too, I suppose?"

"A little."

"Only a little?"

"As much as I am able," she explained.

Thus, by degrees, he led Honoria on, till she told him how, as a tiny child, she had picked out any air she heard on the grand piano which stood in the great drawing-room at Antlet; how, when she was cross or sorry or naughty, she would clear her brow, and dry her tears, and become repentant if her mother would only play her into good temper.

Unconsciously she introduced him to her home circle, and made him free of the innocent, pure, monotonous, and yet most sweet and beautiful, life led by herself and her mother; nay, so completely did he win her confidence, that she told him the greatest secret and hope her life held, namely, that

one day she meant to try and get a song published.

"I think," said the poor child, "if I could only once see my own name in print as a composer I should die happy."

For a moment the veteran—he who had seen so many names in print, and who had known so few composers die happy—turned his head aside and looked out at the landscape between which and himself there seemed to lie a mist; then, after that suspicious pause, he said, a kindly smile softening his face,

"And what is your own name, if sixty-five may make so bold with seventeen?"

"Mine? Oh! I am Honoria Legerton," she said, blushing a little, but speaking quite freely and frankly.

"And I am John Lambe," he said, handing the girl a card. "Are we to part company here?" he went on, as the porters shouted out,—"Wrainton, Wrainton.

Change here for Dilfield, and all stations north. London passengers keep your seats." "It has been a very pleasant journey to me. Good-bye and *au revoir*; the world is very narrow, and we may meet again some day, who knows?"

CHAPTER IV.

HONORIA'S DÉBUT.

A BLAZING hot afternoon, a blue cloudless sky from which the sun looked down unwinkingly upon Dilfield, with its warm frosty streets, its noisy factories, its noisome courts, its pale-faced men and women and sickly rickety children, its town-hall, its market-place, its High Street, and its railway station.

Upon this latter erection, perhaps because it was comparatively speaking in the unshaded country, and therefore completely at his mercy, the sun had shone mercilessly for so many consecutive hours that the tickets in the booking office were quite hot,

and the coloured advertisements hanging against the walls were covered with oily exhalations. At intervals the porters mopped their foreheads, and the station-master accepted numerous offers of stepping across for a glass of whatever he chose to name, whilst two of the young ladies from Jersey House sat on a bench placed outside the waiting-room, fanning themselves, and the horses in their brougham made comfortable by means of very tight bearing reins, very heavy harness, and plenty of it, were being walked up and down the dusty road where hundreds of flies availed themselves of so admirable an opportunity of settling on their glossy coats and quenching their thirst with the blood of such well-fed and well-groomed steeds.

“Will that train *never* arrive?” marvelled the younger Miss Lessant, yawning bitterly. “Tom dear, if you are not afraid of a sun-stroke, do go to the end of the platform and

see if it is coming. You may take my parasol if you like," she added, coquettishly offering a little fanciful bit of finery composed of pink silk lined with white, and ornamented with a great deal of grey and white fringe, for his acceptance.

"Thank you," said the young man called Tom, "but I am not afraid of the sun injuring my complexion, and if I were I do not fancy that expensive trifle would be of much use to me."

"I wish I were a man," sighed the young lady. "Men do not feel the heat so much as we do."

"It would be a noisy world if they did," remarked Tom, and went off to do his lady's bidding.

"Since when, Clara," began the elder Miss Lessant, "have you begun to call young gentlemen dear?"

"Since I found out how very nice they are," replied Miss Clara promptly.

"Do you think your mamma would approve of such familiarity?"

"Very likely mamma never approved of anything pleasant in her life. She does not approve of Tom, for instance. Any one who knows her can see that."

"I am not aware there is anything much about him of which to approve or disapprove," said Miss Lessant indifferently. "I wonder if that train is coming."

"And if so, whether Honoria will be in it. But, of course, she will. All country people are so fearfully punctual. What sort of girl is she really, Tessy?"

"Oh! she is like all other girls," answered Miss Lessant. "I mean like all girls who have been brought up in the country very carefully, and upon very limited means. She is not a tom-boy, evidently. I should say she never rode bare-backed over the hills, or climbed trees, or went out rowing, or that kind of thing."

Neither is she the dairymaid style with fat cheeks and red hands and large feet. She is not pretty, and she has no figure at all. She is lean and tall, and about as shapely as giblets ; and she has that delicate complexion which many girls have who lead an unexciting country life, and live principally on country produce. I should say she has never tasted beer nor wine, nor eaten much animal food. Milk for breakfast probably, with home-made bread and one egg, a pudding for dinner, then tea and bread-and-butter, and perhaps strawberries and cream at eight o'clock, with bed to follow."

"That is the life I should like," exclaimed Clara. "I am so sick of seeing beef and mutton, and fish and soup, and game and entrées."

"You would very soon get more sick of not seeing them, I suspect," answered Miss Lessant. "Poverty may be all very well in theory, but none of us would care to

become acquainted with it practically ; you least of all, Miss Clara. Papa says your dress costs him double Trixy's or mine."

"It is all a mistake," retorted Clara, flushing up at the accusation. "I am sure your things are charged to my account. I have always been the scapegoat for your sins."

"Here is the train at last," said Miss Lessant, shaking out her flowing draperies and looking, to the eyes of the heated passengers, like some cool ice spirit. She scanned the carriages in search of their expected visitor.

"I do not believe she has come," she remarked audibly to her sister.

"Who is that *roasted* girl getting out of the compartment near the engine," asked Clara. "Surely—surely, that is not she?"

"Indeed it is. What an *object*," said Miss Lessant, advancing towards Honoria, who, confused and dusty and dingy, and

hot and tired, was standing looking helplessly at the people about her.

"So you really have come," cried Miss Lessant, elbowing her way through the crowd, and holding out her hand, daintily and tightly gloved, for Honoria's acceptance. "We had almost given you up. Rogers will see to your luggage if you tell him what you have. This is Clara. Mr. Fleming, Miss Legerton."

Miss Lessant's words were civil, and her manner of uttering them courteous enough, but all the time she was speaking she allowed her eyes to wander over Honoria's dress and face till the girl, conscious of her own unseemly condition, could have cried with vexation.

Her dress, spotless as regarded stains when she left Ripley, irreproachable as to stiffness and get-up, was now soiled and crushed.

From the time she changed at Wrainton

the compartment she occupied had filled and emptied at almost every station. Fat men and fatter women pushed past her with baskets and parcels, children had sat opposite and wiped their innocent feet upon her new muslin.

Like the young creature she was, the masterly move of taking a seat at the side furthest from the platforms never occurred to her, and in like manner she was totally unaware that by persisting in sitting face to the engine, and keeping the window down, she was gradually bringing it up to that state of crimson inflamedness which it is the especial privilege of delicately fair complexions to be able on occasion to assume.

The dust lay in layers on her bonnet, her jacket, her collar, and her cuffs.

She felt it up her nostrils and in her mouth, and she knew pretty well what Miss Lessant's mental summary of her appearance amounted to.

"What a disgusting wretch! Thank Heaven, we have the carriage," thought that lady.

"What *will* mamma say?" murmured the more good-natured Clara to her companion. "Did you ever see any one before in such a state of grime?"

"Is not there a well on the roadside between here and the Manor?" he answered, still maintaining the *sotto voce* Clara had begun. "Don't you think we might stop and let her have a wash?"

"Giggling as usual, Clara," exclaimed Miss Lessant at this moment, turning back and frowning at her sister. "Now, Honoria, get in. Don't sit with your back to the horses, child. Papa has sent a pony cart for your luggage. Rogers, you can return with William. Mr. Fleming will sit on the box;" and having, with great dignity, made all these various remarks, Miss Lessant slowly entered the brougham, and gathering



her skirts round her as closely as she could, began to inquire after the health of Mrs. Legerton and Mr. Legerton, and to remark, in answer to Honoria's questions of a like nature, that latterly her papa had been complaining of headache, but that her mamma was quite well.

To a shy young person of either sex there is probably no more dreadful sensation than that caused by the first plunge into the society of almost total strangers.

The first visit, so long looked forward to, which has caused sleepless nights and expectant days, which has been thought over for weeks, and talked about at home generally, from the introductory hours, proves bitter as sour grapes in the mouth of the him or her who has yearned to taste fruit which at a distance seemed so beautiful.

In ninety-nine cases it is the poor relation visiting the rich. Lazarus availing himself

of Dives' invitation to see the great world clothed in purple and fine linen, and faring sumptuously every day, and, till he is in the midst of Dives' magnificence, Lazarus never realizes the nature of the experiment to which he has committed himself.

The men and women are strange ; he may come to like them well ultimately, he may find them the staunchest of friends, the kindest, the most unaffected of created beings, but at first they must seem to him his natural enemies, people of another kind and another order from himself. The servants are a terror to him, the voices of those who address him lack the familiar tones he associates with home, the very country is not that on which his eyes have been accustomed to dwell. Everything surrounding him seems grand, and ceremonious, and lacking in comfort. The conversation, and even that portion specially addressed to himself, refers to matters and persons of

which he has no knowledge. He has not become a citizen of the world ready to pitch his tent anywhere at a moment's notice, and adopt the manners and customs of those among whom he is thrown, and accordingly, ten to one, he goes to bed as utterly wretched as inexperience can make him, and wishes with all his heart and strength he had never left home in order to spend a "pleasant month" elsewhere.

As for Honoria, if wishing could have transported her back to the cottage, she had been there on the wings of the wind.

Crushed up in one corner of the stuffy and well-padded, green-lined brougham, occupying as little space as she could squeeze herself into ; morbidly conscious of the difference between her attire and that of her companions ; feeling her face getting hotter instead of cooler, hotter and redder with every yard the horses trotted ; wonder-

ing if Mrs. Lessant would be shocked at her appearance, thinking how cool and beautiful and self-possessed her companions looked,—Honoria, between Dilfield Station and Jersey House, suffered the pangs of a small martyrdom.

But all she endured on the road was nothing to what she had to encounter on alighting.

Sauntering leisurely over the lawn were the beautiful Miss Lessant attired in a blue-cloth riding-habit, hat, veil, collar, all in place, gloves immaculate, and beside her, a gentleman who looked as if in the whole course of his life he had never been too warm, and who came up with his companion to greet the new arrival.

“This is Honoria, Trix,” said Miss Lessant with a sweet composure.

“How do you do?” said the beauty, looking at the begrimed figure with an excusable astonishment.

"Mr. Carder, my cousin ;" and then Miss Beatrice furtively looked at her glove to see if contact with Honoria's had soiled it, while Mr. Carder held out his hand and said kindly and frankly,

"I have heard so much about you that I feel as if we were old friends."

Hearing which cordial greeting, Honoria's heart gave a great bound, and she would have entered the house comparatively happy had she not happened to catch the beauty's whispered remonstrance,

"How can you be such a humbug, Arthur?"

"Did you not see she was ready to cry ?" he answered.

"Mamma is in the drawing-room," said Clara at this moment ; "come and see her before you go upstairs," but fortunately mamma was not in the drawing-room, only in a conservatory at the end of the hall, from which she cried out,

"Is that you, children? have you brought Honoria back with you?"

"Yes, mamma," said Miss Lessant, "here she is?" and she gave Honoria a little push forward towards the glass doors, where, framed after a manner, stood a tall portly lady, dressed in the very height of the then fashion, and decked out with more lace, ribbon, and jewellery than Honoria had at that period of her life ever seen before on any one human being.

"Welcome to Dilfield, my dear," said Mrs. Lessant in her grandest manner, presenting Honoria at the same time with a small portion of her cheek to kiss. "How warm and tired you look, poor child! What a day for your first long journey! Clara, take her to her room; Mason is there. Her luggage has come. Do not fail to ask for anything you want, dear."

Very wearily Honoria fagged up the wide staircase with Clara.

What she wanted most at that moment if she only had dared to say so, was to go to bed and hide her flushed face under the sheets. Never before since she was born had she felt so tired. Never before had she felt so ashamed of herself and her appearance, as when she chanced to catch a glimpse of a limp, untidy-looking lanky girl in the cheval glass which occupied a prominent position in her bedroom.

And what a dreadfully new bedroom it looked ! The carpet, laid down by experienced stretchers, had not a crease in it ; the bed was a lofty and uncompromising Arabian, upholstered in dark blue damask ; the window curtains were of the same colour and material. There was a marble-topped wash-stand, with blue and gold china fittings ; a large mahogany wardrobe, a small mahogany table furnished with a *papier mâché* inket and blotting-case ; a marble-topped dressing-table, four small chairs, one ditto

easy, and a couch: not an old thing in the room. Everything tidy and bran-new and swept though not garnished, smelling of carpet and varnish.

Honorina walked to the window and opened it.

"Is not it a pretty look out, dear?" asked Clara, who honestly believed an expanse of well-shaven turf, with a cedar tree in the middle of it, as lovely a piece of scenery as could meet the eye.

"It is very nice," agreed the girl, trying to seem delighted.

"Will the young lady give me her keys, please, Miss Clara," said Mason the demure, stepping at this moment into the conversational abyss.

"What is it you want?" asked Honorina, non-comprehending.

"The keys of your boxes, miss. I want to unpack them if you will be so kind as to let me have the keys," explained Mason with

a perhaps unconscious emphasis upon her second utterance of keys.

That was the last thing Honoria could ever have fancied would come to pass ; but without a murmur she resigned her belongings as she had resigned herself to the force of circumstances, and watched even with a certain interest Mason, while, with deft hands and noiseless step, she transferred the girl's most cherished possessions from her trunks to the wardrobe, hung up her dresses, laid her linen in places, found appropriate drawers for gloves, ribbons, and knick-knacks ; put her best bonnet on a shelf by itself, while she took its travelling companion, which Honoria had already begun to despise, out of the room in order to brush some of the dust out of its bows and flowers.

" Well, you are in a mess," said Clara, as with one finger and thumb she lifted Honoria's silk jacket and surveyed it dispassionately.

"Yes; I know I look an object and I feel thoroughly ashamed of myself," agreed Honoria, tears of vexation springing to her eyes.

"Nonsense, child," exclaimed the other cheerfully; "when you are washed and brushed and cooled and oiled and rested, you will feel and look another creature. Have you ever been to Paris? No; of course you have not. I forgot. Well, I have; and you should see—you should see Trix and Teasy when they land after the passage. You never did, never, behold such objects! Teasy looks fifty if she looks an hour; and if Trix painted, which she does not, the pink could not be washed more completely out of her cheeks than it is after an hour's sea-sickness. Travelling is becoming to no one I ever knew, particularly under a broiling sun. Should you like to have a cup of tea—or a glass of wine or anything? No; I am afraid you must not

have a tumbler of water. Mason, does not drinking cold water when one is warm bring out pimples or blotches or something? *I* know mamma will never let us touch it."

Mason was putting away Honoria's bonnet as her young mistress spoke, but turned to say solemnly she believed "Cold water either inside or out was very bad for the complexion. It sent the "blood back,'" she explained, "chilled the stomach, and produced humours that ended in 'breakings out.'" She had once known a lady who turned her complexion in "a day" from clear red and white to a sort of mottle, with dipping her face in water when she came in warm from her ride. "Besides" added Mason, "there is no good in cold water, it makes a person feel hotter afterwards, and—"

"That will do, Mason," said Clara, interrupting this flow of wisdom and experience. "Miss Legerton's face shall

not be mottled if I can help it. Honie, you must not take cold water ex- or internally. Now shall Mason help you or would you rather be alone? Rather be alone. That is all right. Then I will come for you when I am dressed for dinner. We dine at six sharp; that is a fad of our respected papa, who never has any luncheon, only a biscuit and a glass of sherry in the middle of the day. You need not array yourself like the Queen of Sheba. There will be nobody to admire you if you do. We shall be all alone, five women and two men, if you think Tom Fleming old enough to be called a man. I tell him he is a hobble-dehoy, and that makes him so angry."

"Who is Mr. Fleming," asked Honoria with a languid interest.

"He is my papa's nephew, the only son of his mother and she a widow. He has been studying too hard, and fallen in consequence into delicate health, and papa asked

him to spend the summer with us. He is to be a clergyman, so that is his history as far as it as yet proceeded on its way from Genesis to Revelations. And now you, poor dear, I will leave you in peace for a while. I am sure my chatter must have made your head ache."

Left alone, Honoria sat down on the couch at the foot of the bed, and began slowly to take off her cuffs, unfasten her dress, and loosen her hair. Studioously she kept her eyes averted from the hateful glass, which had presented herself in one piece to her own appalled gaze.

"I knew I never was pretty," she thought, "but I never imagined I could look so ugly as that. And my clothes are so different from theirs. I wonder how Mr. Warren could tell exactly what I should feel when I came here. Ah!" and as she recalled the memory of Mr. Warren free of the cottage, free to follow her about where-

ever she went, finding fault with her for loving that which was almost as necessary to her as the air she breathed, haunting her like her shadow and hovering perpetually on the verge of a proposal he feared to make as much as she dreaded to hear, Honoria rose up with renewed energy and, regardless of Mason's dictum, plunged face and head into a basin of cold water, and sponged and laved till even her burning cheeks grew cool.

A natural tint they would not be for days, but that evil was secondary to the painful tingling which had made her feel so conscious and so ashamed.

And as she dipped and dipped, sense and courage came back to her.

"Why should I be so much afraid of what they think of me?" she considered, while, gasping for breath, she watched the water dripping from her hair. "Have I not all my life heard a gentlewoman should

be independent of circumstances, dress, and money. Honie Legerton, you must have some bad blood in your veins after all, and I am disgusted with you. What would your mammie say if she saw her daughter downcast because other people look prettier and are grander and richer than herself? And I must write to my mammie too, at once. What a shame to have forgotten her even for a moment!"

And so considering, the "mother's darling" packed away her wet hair in a towel, and taking out paper and envelopes, began to write.

"Dearest mammie," so ran the note. "Here I am safe and sound, but looking—oh! such a sight, with dust and grit and sunburn. Theresa and Clara met me at the station, and also a Mr. Fleming, a nephew of Mr. Lessant's. Both Theresa and Clara are very handsome, though in very different

styles ; but Beatrice, whom I saw afterwards, just home from a ride with her *fiancé*, is *the* beauty in fact as well as by reputation.

“ She is most lovely ; but I do not think I like her. I think if I were Mr. Carder I would rather marry Clara than any of them ; she seems very merry and good-natured.

“ I had a nice journey as far as Wrainton. An old friend of Mrs. Caruth's travelled with me so far, on his way to London—a dear old gentleman—I enclose his card. He seemed to like her immensely, and was very kind, indeed, to me.

“ Everything here, as far as I have seen, is very grand. A footman looked after my luggage, fancy ! And a maid unpacked my boxes, and put away my finery. It seems all like a dream, but I imagine I shall in the long-run think that putting away my own things with dear old Nancy looking on is best.

“ My own darling mammie, good-bye till
to-morrow. Love to papa and Mrs. Caruth.
Tell Mr. Warren I hope the sun to-day
was as pleasant to his hay as it was dis-
agreeable to me.

“ A thousand loves and kisses.

“ Your affectionate daughter,
“ HONIE.”

If Honie had, as she said, any of the snob element about her—and who, alas ! has not nowadays?—at least, God be thanked, since she is my heroine, there was not a suspicion of a cad in her nature.

Who amongst us has not seen the cad at home, threatening to do this, that, and the other unless he was pitchforked into a profession, or allowed to marry some beggar's daughter, or given the wherewithal to lounge about in elegant leisure while others perhaps sit at home and stint themselves of every necessary ?

And who, further, has not read the cad's letters from abroad? He never writes when fortune favours him; nay, rather he always selects the period when things look at their very worst to indite an epistle to his foolish mother or his too confiding sister.

He has been robbed, he has had fever, his partner has skedaddled, his sheep have died of rot, his cattle of drought.

And then the kindly dupes at home club together and send out their poor savings, which serve him, perhaps, for one week's debauch, but which cannot save him from the disgrace and the sickness, and the misery and the social death his own acts, more swift in judgment in a new country than in an old, have entailed upon himself.

No, Honoria was not a coward. She was young, impressionable, susceptible, but from the one incurable vice to which even otherwise noble natures are sometimes subject, she was exempt. She had in her none of

the “making the worst of it,” which extracts so many a sovereign from those who would never in their most grievous need think of making the worst of anything.

To the death Honoria would have fought ere uselessly making another a partaker of her misery. Unconsciously to her herself, strong in the strength of her enormous love for her mother, she was fighting against her weaker physical self the time she indited that letter home.

The letter finished, she set herself to robing her person and tiring her head. She had just begun the last occupation when an apologetic knock at the door was followed by Mason's head and person.

“I beg pardon, miss, but have you anything for the post,” said that superior person. “I thought that perhaps—”

“Oh ! thank you so very, very much,” cried Honoria, without allowing the woman time to finish her sentence. “There is that

letter for my mother. She will be disappointed if she does not hear from me."

"Yes, miss, no doubt." So far Mason according to her conventional lights; then, yielding to nature, "Lor', miss, what a head of hair you have! How I should love to dress it! May I come up again; I shall not be five minutes?"

"Certainly," said Honoria, and then sat down quite quietly, hands folded together, wondering—

Was her hair of any extraordinary length or thickness or quality? It was wringing wet, of that fact alone she seemed to have cognizance.

Through her hands, and through her hands again, she passed the long damp tresses.

"My mammie loved my hair, she always said, and now I begin to understand why. Not only because it was her child's, but because it was beautiful."

And then with a revulsion of feeling such as sometimes oppresses the young, she added, "Ah! not because, but notwithstanding. Had I been the ugliest girl upon the face of the earth, my mammie would have loved me all the more."

Wherein she was right. Women like Marion Legerton are apt to love the maim, the halt, the blind, more than all the world beside.

"What a shame, miss, for you to go ruining your hair with water!" remarked Mason, as she rubbed and brushed Honoria's luxuriant tresses. "That is the way to rot the roots."

"Why, I wash it every day," observed Honoria, who, if before her time in sanitary matters, was undoubtedly greatly behind it in all that pertained to personal adornment.

"Well, miss, more is the pity," said Mason. "You are young now, but when you grow older you will be sorry

for not having taken more care of yourself. Water is a thing which ought never to be allowed to touch the hair. When I lived with Lady Faddleton, she would no more have permitted her daughters to wash their heads, than she would have let them drink poison. 'A little oil, Mason,' she used to say, 'and a *very* soft brush are all that is necessary.'"

"How very dirty they must have been!" was Honoria's comment.

"Not at all, miss," said Mason. "It is well known that the more hair is washed, the more washing it requires; the wet attracts dust, and the consequence is that the less the head is washed the cleaner it is. Miss Marie Faddleton's hair used to look like burnished gold. It shone like a mirror. It was neither so thick nor so long as yours, miss; if it had wouldn't she have taken care of it! but it was a most beautiful colour, and always

so easy to work. The plaits were as smooth as smooth could be."

"I am not surprised at that," commented Honoria.

"And the care Lady Faddleton made them take of their complexions to be sure. The whole time I was with them the young ladies were never allowed to sit near a window if the sun was on it, unless the blind was quite drawn down. And till they were far on in their teens they had to wear, oh ! such great sun-bonnets ; and afterwards, no matter how warm the day, they had always to keep thick veils close over their faces and hold up parasols as well. One of them married the Marquis of Dumfries, and Miss Marie, Sir Hume Fitz-Hugh."

"What a pity I sat in the sun to-day, and did not wear a veil or hold up a parasol !" sighed Honoria.

"Oh ! miss, don't fret about that," said Mason soothingly. "You will know better

another time, and if you put a little of the cream our young ladies use for sun-burn on your face when you go to bed to-night, you will find the redness almost gone by morning.

“And now, miss,” added Mason triumphantly, “will you be pleased to look at yourself?” and she turned the glass round in order that Honoria might view her charms.

Honoria looked at herself.

“What a fright!” she exclaimed, then catching an expression of disappointment on Mason’s face, she said hurriedly, “You have done up my hair beautifully; I never had it so nicely dressed before.”

“If I might advise, miss, I should wear the dark barège this evening; it will take off from the effect of the sun-burning a little. Anything light would make it so conspicuous.”

“I am afraid it will be conspicuous, no

matter what I wear," answered Honoria; "but I will follow your advice."

"A very nice young lady," remarked Mason afterwards to Mrs. Lessant. "Anybody may see that, although she has been brought up in the country, she is quite the gentlewoman."

"I should hope so—being a relation of mine," said Mrs. Lessant with assertion.

To have heard Mrs. Lessant speak of herself and her family, any one might have imagined she was descended from the Hapsburgs or Plantagenets.

Even Mr. Lessant, who was proud of his wife's blue blood and aristocratic breeding, waxed sometimes rather restive under the curb with which she rode him; and, indeed, it is not too much to say that he never felt quite easy when in her company, or that of his two elder daughters. As for his only son Mr. Algernon Lessant, who was a briefless barrister, and likely to remain so, he treated

his "relieving officer" with undisguised contempt.

"We Jerseys," was a favourite phrase on the lips of this extremely useless gentleman, but no one ever heard him speak of the Lessants as if a drop of their blood flowed in his veins.

It certainly seemed somewhat hard that Mr. Lessant should have so little pleasure in his home, or comfort in his children. To be sure, there was Clara, but then her father had to pay dear for that privilege, as for most others.

"I am very glad indeed to see you, my dear," said this good-natured individual, addressing Honoria, when, with many misgivings, she entered the drawing-room, trying to hide herself behind Clara's ample skirts. "Why, how you have grown since last year! you must be half a head taller than Clara; come here, and let me have a good look at you;" and he drew her to the win-

dow, and took such a remarkably good look that the girl, conscious of her own imperfections, felt herself turning from crimson to the colour of a rich beet-root.

"She is not like her mother, Mrs. L.," he continued. "Takes more after Legerton, eh?"

"There never was a Jersey yet who had light hair," said Mrs. Lessant decidedly.

"No, you are not like your mother," repeated Mr. Lessant. "What a pretty creature she was, to be sure, when I first saw her, and how she has altered! you would not know her now," he added, turning towards his wife.

"Most probably not; the marvel would be if she were unaltered," said that lady. "People rarely look the same at forty as at eighteen."

"They do not usually change as much as Marion has done, however," persisted Mr Lessant. "She looks older than you, Mrs L. I give you my word she does."

"There is surely not any necessity," suggested his wife, "to be so vehement about the matter. I can readily believe what you state," and Mrs. Lessant drew herself up, and despite the accusing witness of her daughter's fully developed charms, tried to look something under forty.

"You must enjoy yourself, you know, while you are here," went on Mr. Lessant. "We have not your favourite sea, but I think there is everything else you can want in the way of amusement; and now let us go in to dinner. I hope you are very hungry—I always am. But, then, I eat no luncheon. You ladies always spoil your dinner appetites with luncheon."

"I do not think I have spoiled mine," said Honoria. "I have had nothing but a stale bun and a glass of lemonade since I left home."

"Do you hear that, Mrs. L.?" cried Mr. Lessant, looking back at his portly spouse.

"This poor little girl is starving. She says you take no care of her; that she has not had a mouthful of anything since she came into the house."

"How can you be so absurd!" exclaimed Mrs. Lessant, "considering she has only been in the house about an hour, and in that time had to change her dress and get rid of the dust of travel, it would have been great folly to forestall her dinner."

"True, very true, my dear," argued Mr. Lessant, while Honoria involuntarily tightened her hold of his arm. "It would have been a folly and a pity too. Now, my dear, will you have some soup? Capital thing soup to begin with," and—for those were the days ere *à la Russe* banquets came into vogue—the good-natured gentleman ladled out a plate quite full, and sent it to his right-hand neighbour.

"A third of that quantity for me," said Mrs. Lessant languidly.

"None for me," followed Miss Lessant.
"Or me," echoed Miss Beatrice.

"So you may send double portions to me and Tom, papa," suggested Clara; "we are both as hungry as hunters."

"My dear Clara!" remonstrated her mother.

It was the same when the fish came; Mrs. Lessant, eating morsels of bread, sat at the head of the table, a silent protest against her husband's enjoyment of his dinner. And, indeed, whatever the particular course chanced to be, the spectacle of Mr. Lessant partaking of it was not a pleasant sight.

As a commencement, he tucked his napkin well over his chest, and thus armed against accidents, he attacked his food ravenously, eating till the veins of his forehead came prominently into notice, and his cheeks grew redder than those of the weather-beaten maiden at his side.

For more years than she would have cared to confess to, Mrs. Lessant had striven to convert her husband to a more Christian mode of feeding. She had told him it was not polite to make a noise when swallowing his soup ; and that gulping it, was contrary to every rule of etiquette. She assured him no one of any pretension to the position of a gentleman ever used a knife to fish. She said that if he must have beer, he ought not to drink it like a horse, and audibly ejaculate a thankful "Ah!" when he set down his glass. She asked if he had ever seen her mash up her potatoes in gravy, or take her fork in her right hand when she wished to partake of that vegetable. She stated that if every one fell into a practice of eating peas with a dessert spoon, it would be necessary to provide four or five dishes for each dinner. She observed that "her father sipped his wine, as was still, she believed, the habit of good society," and

she strongly objected to one of Mr. Lessant's many favourite devices, viz., dipping the corner of his napkin in the finger-glass, in order the better to wipe his mouth.

All these habits she had endeavoured to correct, and all of them were strong as ever when Honoria arrived at Jersey House.

The contrast, therefore, of Mrs. Lessant, foodless, and Mr. Lessant, feeding, was somewhat remarkable. As Mrs. Lessant said to her daughters,

"Your papa really should eat alone. He never ought to sit down to table with any one of the slightest refinement."

Which was perhaps the reason why, as she broke tiny atoms off her bread, Miss Lessant's Roman nose assumed such a fine expression of disgust, and Beatrice kept her fine eyes fastened so assiduously on the épergne.

As for Honoria, she first looked at Mr. Lessant in wonder, not unmixed with awe;

and then, conscious of her own want of civility, turned an uneasy glance round the table to see if any one had noticed her surprise.

If Mrs. Lessant did happen to perceive it, she took no notice of her guest's astonishment; but Clara, at the opposite side of the table, made a little grimace indicative of amusement, which disconcerted Honoria beyond measure.

Devotion to his own meal did not, however, prevent Mr. Lessant noticing that the new-comer ate scarcely anything.

"Why, you said you were hungry, child," he exclaimed for the twentieth time, when she refused some fresh delicacy of which he urged her to partake. "And you have not touched your wine."

"I never take wine," said the girl timidly.

"Nonsense, child; that may be all very well at Frodsham, but we will teach you

different ways here. Horman, give Miss Legerton some champagne ; all ladies like champagne ; that is the proper thing to have after a long journey—indeed, it is the proper thing always. Now, now, don't say 'No.' I say 'Yes,' and I expect you to obey me while I have you in charge. Horman, be quick, will you ? "

"Miss Legerton is ill !" exclaimed young Fleming, at this moment rising hurriedly from his seat ; "she is going to faint, I think."

"No, no," said Honoria ; "it is only —it is only —" and the épergne seemed to dance up and touch the chandelier ; the table swam round one way before her eyes, and the chairs and their occupants another ; twenty windows took the place of three, and then all blended into one, whilst the light appeared to vanish, and darkness closed about her.

"God bless me," cried Mr. Lessant,

clutching her waist. "What is this, Mrs. L. What can we do for her?"

"That is the worst of all those country girls," said Mrs. L. "Any excitement upsets them. They never think of husbanding their strength, and then they break down at the most inopportune times."

"I shall be better in a moment," said Honoria feebly. She had not tact enough to pretend that she was insensible. "I am sorry to have been so foolish."

"There, don't try to talk," interrupted Mrs. Lessant. "Let her lean on you, Tom, and get her into the drawing-room, if you can. I dare say the heat has been too much for her. Do not attempt to carry her, Mr. Lessant, *I beg*. That is better, Tom," she added approvingly, as Tom put both his arms round the girl, and so supported her to the door.

"Oh ! let me sit down," she pleaded

when they reached the hall; "and do not stay here, please; I shall be well now there is a little air."

"She had better go to bed," said Mrs. Lessant, looking at her visitor critically. "Horman, tell Mason to come here at once. Do you think you can stand now, my dear?" she added in a kinder tone. "Put your hand on Mr. Fleming's shoulder; he will help you upstairs. You need not go with her, Clara: Mason will know what is required. Well, if you will go, of course you must; though you will only make her worse if you fuss so about her." The lady's tone was sharp, but her look was mild, and had Clara only happened to look back when she reached the first landing, she would have seen that Mrs. Lessant's face wore a smile as she watched Clara's dear cousin Tom supporting Honoria; his arm round her waist, her head almost resting on his shoulder, his cheek touching her hair,

and his eyes bent upon her with a tender solicitude.

"You need not make yourself uneasy, Robert," said Mrs. Lessant to her husband, as she once again seated herself at the head of her table. "I do not think there is anything serious the matter with the girl, but I shall go up and see her again presently."

"Yes, my dear," answered Mr. Lessant, the while he looked over a dish of strawberries at his wife, and wondered why she spoke so graciously and looked so pleasant.

CHAPTER V.

THE LESSANTS.

ALTHOUGH the sentimental novelists of half a century back had their little failings, they never fell into the vice of making refinement a matter of money.

It is true they clothed their heroines in muslins, perennially and supernally white, and that they endowed them with a facility of fainting, as touching as astonishing ; but, if they were silly in these respects, they were wise (or innocent ?) in ignoring the surroundings, which, at the present moment, are deemed essential for a heroine of fiction.

There is nothing truer, heaven knows, than that fiction concaves reality, and it needs no enormous amount of penetration to understand we have arrived at a period when men—and, God help them, women too—are not judged by what they are, but by what money enables them to seem. In short, arriving at conclusions from our novels, we have established the servants' creed for our social religion,—according to which, madam in silks, who may have risen from the nearest gutter, is a Lady; and miss in stuff, who unites in her own person the blood, breeding, and refinement of all the best blood, breeding, and refinement in England, is a Person.

We cannot alter these facts, though we may lament their existence. We cannot undo the evil wrought by cities, or comfort the sorrow caused by a wrong system of trade.

There is only one certainty on which we

can depend,—ultimately the curse will be overcome by a blessing.

Eventually people must get so sick of trying to outvie other people, of having larger houses, more gorgeous drawing-rooms, more wonderful pictures, bigger conservatories, huger bunches of grapes, more plate, more china, more noise and clamour—that at last they will say, Hold ! Enough ! Let us try to play at some less costly and irrational game—a game in which bluster and brag are nowhere, and Christianity, and Christianity's children, unselfishness, truthfulness, and a gentle liberal spirit, all in all.

For bethink you, dear reader, if we go on as we are going, with our still more gorgeous drawing-rooms, our dinners dearer and more comfortless as days and years pass by, our wines of various vintages, and of most inferior qualities, though of such fearfully greater price,—where shall we end at last ?

Is not our social system becoming a domestic European armament, and how shall we ever compass peace of mind or rest of body unless we agree upon some style of living, which shall not entail endless competition with our neighbour, and mean less the omnipotence of the "almighty dollar" than the power of culture, refinement, and self-respect?

Before, however, the world gets sick and weary of the glitter of wealth and greater wealth; before it ceases to bow down and worship golden calves that have no virtue of healing in them, I wonder what height of unreality and absurdity society will have reached.

Like the sailor who, for his third wish, could only think of "more rum," having already expressed a desire for an ocean of his favourite liquor, the wealthy classes have arrived at a point when money can only assert its existence by costlier carriages,

finer horses, richer furniture, larger houses, a greater number of servants, and so to the end of the chapter.

Can luxury go much further than it has already done? Was there ever a time in the world's history when the middle classes aped to such an extent the habits of the nobility, was there ever an age when servants trod so closely on the heels of their masters?

If money be, as many seem to think, synonymous with civilization, we have become civilized indeed. Each year as it comes, finds our necessities increasing, and our pleasures decreasing.

What shall it avail a man now, though he speak with the tongue of an angel, if his gifts fail to bring him in gold?

Shall he be well considered because he is a true Christian, a devoted patriot, a genius, a philanthropist, a hero? By no means, unless he can turn his Christianity, his patriot-

ism, his genius, his philanthropy, his heroism to account.

Better, so far as his fellows and this world are concerned, that he were a swindling promoter, or an unscrupulous speculator, a robber of the widow, and plunderer of the orphan, than a man convicted of poverty, that worst crime the laws of modern society recognize.

So lay this to heart, friends ; if you thieve on a sufficiently large scale, those whose opinion you value will say, " What a clever fellow ;" if you write somebody else's name for a good amount, and are sentenced to penal servitude, the men you have associated with will sympathize with and help you if they can.

It is only the poor and the unsuccessful who have nowadays no right to exist at all.

If you who read are poor and unsuccessful, you understand exactly what the world

thinks of those who have failed to win any of its prizes.

And, according to its present lights, the world is quite correct in its judgment.

The man who has swindled may and will swindle once more successfully. He may again have his big house in town, and his charming country residence, presumably in the valley of the Thames, whither such as he seem, by some as yet undiscovered affinity, to gravitate. He may, though now under a cloud, be able hereafter to give fifties and hundreds to metropolitan and local charities, to build churches, to present bells, to give organs, to cause small shopkeepers to wax fat and kick.

He goes down, as the uninitiated might suppose, covered with dishonour, but if one can wait a little, and watch the game, he will be seen to come up again cool and smiling, with plenty of loose silver in his

waistcoat pocket, and a good balance at his bankers, for another round with fate, and wins once again, and goes on winning till the inevitable hour comes when he loses, for the second, third, or fourth time, as the case may be.

He is now on the crest of the wave, now in the trough of the billows, and the world likes, admires, and pities him, when he is temporarily submerged. The clergy say it is very sad, and the local tradesman laments over him audibly, whilst for you who believe in honesty, economy, and a few other of the old-fashioned virtues that went out of date about the time ribbon bordering came in, there is no fatted calf killed, but only a piece of the very coldest shoulder possible, presented for your acceptance.

For you there is no hope, there is no temporal salvation possible, you have been unsuccessful, your play has been damned, your business has gone to the dogs ; you are

still a curate, still a parish doctor, still a plodding and almost briefless barrister,—in a word, a failure.

True, you may have paid your bills with a scrupulous regard to honesty. What does that avail, when your custom is scarce worth the having? Your wife may be quite straight with draper and dress-maker, but then, good heavens! she might as well not be straight when she only indulges in two new gowns a year.

Your own common sense must tell you that the clergy could not exist, the doctor could not maintain his carriage, the grocer and the baker, and the candle-stick maker, could not keep open even their little shops if the whole population reckoned up the odd farthings, and looked after cheese-parings as you poor unsuccessful and passably honest are obliged to do.

The world is striding on, faster and faster every day, and if you cannot keep pace with

it, why you must be content, sitting by the wayside, or tilling your poor patch of ground, to look at the pageantry of busy life from a distance, instead of bemoaning your fate that you cannot be footing it with the best.

You must choose, you see, whether you will seek perilous popularity, or ignoble obscurity ; whether you will pick your way beside a quicksand, or toil for life across ploughed fields, whether you will barter a quiet mind and a healthy conscience for the world's mad pleasures, and the world's senseless applause, or live a life which to modern ideas no doubt seems desirable, but which, spite of organ giving and alms bestowing, of church building and hospital endowing, will profit you not one doit when the end comes, and you are lying in the most awful loneliness humanity knows, with crossed hands, with blanched face, with impotent body, in the ante-room of eternity,

with only a few short beats of your labouring heart separating you from the Awful Hereafter.

Ah ! then perhaps, if you have chosen aright, it won't much matter what man thought of you. Passing from time's petty vanities, petty annoyances, petty possible triumphs, into the Great Everlasting, it may be that you on whom the later apostles, bishops, rectors, curates, and such like, scarcely bestowed a thought ; to whom tradespeople forgot to be very civil ; who were not held of much account in certain circles your soul once longed to be free of, shall behold in the final agony, God's angels standing on the Eternal Shores, and stretching out tender hands to welcome the tired wayfarer—Home.

“ But what has all this, true enough, or false enough, we care little which, to do with your story,” I can prophetically hear asked by the modern novel reader, who easily gets through the orthodox three

volumes of hard writing, a day. Much, my impatient friend, as you will find if you only are kind enough to travel on to the last chapter.

There must be a beginning to all things, though we may not have been present at their creation, just as they will have an end, though we do not survive to see it; and in the gradual development of circumstances, it so happened that within a few years of the time when Honoria went to visit her relatives, money had begun, even in provincial towns, to assert its mastery over blood.

From London, the idea of wealth being temporarily-speaking omnipotent, was spreading even to quiet country districts. The leaven which once seemed so insignificant, was gradually leavening the whole tone and temper of society. A change, not the less complete, because so utterly silent, was revolutionizing all ranks and classes.

Blood had had its day, and not done all the good perhaps it should in that day ; and, accordingly, money, thinking its turn had come, was elbowing its way to the front, and with every onward step making its influence felt.

Naturally, it was in those centres where commerce held its court that the new religion found most favour. It was delightful to men who could never hope to be gentlemen, in the old sense of the word,—never so long as they lived, and had their living to find,—that a road had been opened which led to the realms of a new aristocracy.

Here was at last something industry could compass, and success command.

Here was a land, beset with difficulties it might be, but still possible of access ; a land flowing with milk and honey, which was not reserved for any chosen band of predestined conquerors, but free and open to the footsteps of all comers.

For generations, those with the ability to rise in the world, had writhed under the passive contempt of those who had no ability at all.

Living on the acres, and supported by the rank won by some remote ancestor, birth and station had interposed a resistance, passive indeed, but hitherto omnipotent between men who had been the architects of their own fortunes, and the lands, apparently overflowing with milk and honey, their souls desired.

Slowly, however, money began to assert itself. Though birth might scoff at its aspirations, birth, as certain incomes produced fewer and fewer luxuries, gradually discovered there was something in money, even if made in trade, to be desired.

Money could subscribe to local charities, money could build and endow churches, money could turn the scale at elections, money could in an almost gentlemanly

manner, assist my lord when the interest on his mortgages was long overdue, and some one or other of the sons of Israel pressing in their demands.

In return for these good offices, it became expedient to recognize money; which the clergy, foremost in all good works, speedily did.

What though the neighbouring baronet, or local squire, with purses as short as their pedigrees were long, held aloof from contact with wealth recently acquired, some kind rector or archdeacon was pretty nearly sure to hail Dives as his "worthy friend," and button-hole him nothing loth on the subject of the school-house, or mission, or chapel of ease, which lay nearest at the moment to the clerical heart.

And then there were mothers with portionless girls, younger sons who felt compelled to marry heiresses, no matter from what stock they sprung.

All in a moment the world seemed to grow old and crowded. For the daughters there were no husbands of their own rank who could afford to maintain poor wives ; and for the sons, why they too had to look further afield for suitable settlements than formerly.

Rank could not maintain its old prestige without money, and held out a friendly hand towards its old enemy, which tardy courtesy money has in these latter days returned by usurping the throne once occupied by rank, and forcing upon society a more despotic and unendurable form of government than ever obtained under the ancient *régime*.

It was in the days when rank was somewhat arrogant towards “new people,” even though educated and possessed of all the subtle instincts of refinement, that Robert Lessant, Esq., then only Bob Lessant, wrote from his mother’s humble home, in an adjoining county, to the then great banking

house of Latimer, Walker, Latimer, and Carder, proffering his services as clerk.

The Messrs. Latimer wanted a clerk at that time, and though those were not the days of advertising, the fact was known for a circuit of thirty miles.

Quite by accident Lessant heard of the vacant post, applied for, and was selected to fill it, out of fifty candidates.

The young fellow wrote a remarkably clear and good commercial hand, embellished, according to the business fashion of those days, with certain flourishes which hit the then happy mean between extravagance and boldness. This pleased old Latimer, who conceived his own writing, which chanced to be somewhat in the same style, a specimen of calligraphy as near perfection as man could reasonably hope to attain.

"Further," to quote from Mr. Lessant's original letter, "your most humble and obedient servant, Robert Lessant," evinced

a certain neatness in the matter of figures which charmed Mr. Walker, who considered, and perhaps not without reason, a clean clear column of figures a very desirable item in a banking establishment.

Latimer, junior, liked the style of his signature, and thought the "man was likely to keep to his station," while Carder, the junior partner, whose opinion was taken as a mere matter of form, said it did not signify to him who came, "provided he did his work."

Accordingly, all references being satisfactory, and securities proving the same, Mr. Lessant, at the time my now middle-aged readers were born, entered the old-established house of Latimer, Walker, Latimer, and Carder, and devoted himself thenceforth to the interests of his principals, and of himself, with an assiduity and ability rare even in those days of respectable and long-headed *employés*.

Before many years had elapsed, Mr. Lessant was virtually manager of the bank.

Old Latimer, though he came to the familiar place in the High Street, at ten every morning, as regularly as clock work, was, nevertheless, to the perception of every one but himself, a shrivelling dotard.

Indeed, so imbecile was he, that after his death his family, finding it necessary to dispute his last testamentary dispositions, subpoenaed Lessant to speak to his total incapacity, on which occasion Lessant testified to such purpose, that the Misses Latimer presented him with a gold watch and chain, and their brother, before the clerk left London, asked him to dinner at his club.

In following his partner's remains to the grave, Mr. Walker caught a cold, which ended fatally; and as he left no male relation, though he died rich and blessed with plenty of daughters, the bank was able

to buy out his interest with great celerity.

Behold, then, the remaining components of the bank.

Latimer, once junior, now senior by the grace of death, who despised trade, and desired to kick the ladder which had served his turn, away; and Mr. Carder, whose share in the establishment was very small indeed, when compared with that owned by his fellow-partners.

At length, Mr. Latimer announced his intention of retiring from the business, which so unnerved the remaining principal, that he would at once have thrown up his cards, had it not been for Robert Lessant, who possessed more commercial capacity than had been enjoyed jointly by the four masters, for many and many a day.

It was he who so arranged the time and manner of Mr. Latimer's severance with the

Hillfordshire Bank, that no panic seized the public with regard to its stability. It was he who insisted on the gradual, instead of immediate, withdrawal of Mr. Latimer's stake; he who started the rumour, which even Mr. Latimer believed, that a great London capitalist was about to join the concern; and he who, virtually taking the reins out of Mr. Carder's shaking hands, drove their business coach over every obstacle to success.

He had the bank swept and garnished, painted inside and out, refurnished with French-polished counters, and adorned with brass rails wherever such ornaments could be placed. The clerks received a gratuity, and a hint that if they increased the amount of their tailors' bills, such a proceeding would find favour in the eyes of their employers.

Mr. Carder invited the principal manufacturers who dealt with the bank to a dinner

at the White Stag ; and several of the county gentry being good enough to drop a hint that if their presence was likely to be beneficial, he had but to ask and have, the festive board was embellished with guests the manufacturers felt gratified to meet.

That no one might feel neglected, Mr. Lessant sought and obtained the use for a day of Mr. Jersey's house and grounds at Littlesham, Mr. Jersey being absent, and gave a great entertainment to the farmers, and the farmers' families, of Hillfordshire ; to which likewise were bidden every tradesman who did business with the bank, as well as their wives, daughters, and parents.

It was on this occasion that the local attorney, in proposing Mr. Lessant's health, stated he knew every one present would be delighted to hear their esteemed host was about to take that leading position in Dilfield to which his talents, industry, amiability, and character, entitled him to aspire. For

more years than he, the speaker, cared to recall, those he addressed had known him as the very right hand of the Hillfordshire Bank, but now there was to be a change; for the future Mr. Lessant would be an integral part of the bank. He, the local attorney, felt he could say nothing which could please them more than this fact, and he would therefore only ask them to drink the health of their esteemed host with all the honours.

Afterwards Robert Lessant said, that was the proudest moment of all his life, the proudest and the happiest. God help him!

When we have arrived at fruition, decay sets in; and heaven pity the man who before he reaches middle age has touched the acme of that which means success to him.

But it was all like walking through fairy-land then. He had striven and achieved,

he had laboured, and was receiving royal hire. He had been a poor man, and now his fortune was made ; and while the cheers rang out, and the huzzahs resounded, he turned for a moment sick and faint with excitement, and could, notwithstanding all his energy, only stammer out a few words of thanks ere his bottle-holder the local attorney led him, overcome with genuine emotion, off the scene.

That emotion proved the pearl in his cup of success. After all, though people may scoff outwardly at human weaknesses, they have a tenderness for them. The "touch of nature which makes all men kin," is felt even to the heart's core, while those who desire to seem stoical are making merry over it ; and most unquestionably the fact of a partner in the "old bank" being overwhelmed by their congratulations, delighted the farmers and tradesmen who had offered them.

The magic of success has a curious effect. Six months previously Mr. Lessant had not seemed anybody in particular, but on that fine summer's day when the civilized population of Dilfield, fed in tents erected on Mr. Jersey's lawn, Robert Lessant, Esq., was recognised as a power.

So quietly had he climbed each step of his ladder, that no one had ever thought of his standing where he did, till the fact was openly announced ; and then suddenly every person discovered he was the right man in the right place, that his promotion would be a good thing for the neighbourhood, that it was about time some fresh and sympathetic blood mixed itself with the sluggish stream of old ideas, and out-of-date prejudices.

Dilfield wanted a more go-a-head system of business than had hitherto characterized the proceedings of the Hillfordshire bank. Time passed more rapidly, tides ebbed and flowed with greater uncertainty than had

been the case when old Latimer's grandfather opened his little pottering money shop in the market-place. The new capitalist had shown his sense by putting Mr. Lessant in a position to benefit his friends and push a good business. So Dilfield said, adding as a natural consequence,

"Here is prosperity to them all ; Carder, Lessant, and the London gentleman. Hip, hip, hurrah ! Give it again, hip-hip-hurra-rah."

Well, the bank went on, and apparently prospered. Mr. Carder and Mr. Lessant kept their own counsel, and no one suspected that the London Capitalist was a myth ; and that the money paid to Mr. Latimer was really the very heart's blood of the concern.

But, as has been said, the partners were both men able to keep a secret.

If they had not a millionaire at their back, they at all events found means to advance

money on landed properties when gentlemen of their acquaintance were hard up.

Old Latimer had done this sort of business also, but not agreeably.

He maintained, he said, that gentlemen should live within their incomes, he believed that a mortgage was the beginning of ruin, he opined that when such applications were made to the firm, it was necessary to proceed with great caution. In fact, he generally contrived to surround the matter with such difficulties, that intending mortgagees, as a rule, lost patience, and carried their business elsewhere.

From the time that Mr. Lessant, however, entered the firm, all the old traditions were forgotten.

Every one possessed of any tangible property could have an advance made on it, with as much facility as though the Hillofdshire Bank had been a “mont de piété.” All sorts of queer securities found their way

into the banker's strong room ; and as a natural consequence, strange family secrets followed suit.

This is not the life's story of Robert Lessant, or I could tell some singular adventures which befel the new partner, adventures never told even to the wife of his bosom, who fancied herself *au fait* of the whole history, past, present, and possibly ever to come, of the man upon whom she looked with a lofty contempt it was impossible for her always to conceal.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GREY MARE.

WHEN Mr. Lessant asked his future wife, then Theresa Jersey, to make him happy, the lady had arrived at that age and condition of mind in which spinsters find it necessary to put the humiliating question to themselves, “Who will marry me?”

For more years than she would then have cared to count, Miss Jersey had considered “whom shall I marry?” but the ideal husband somehow never wanted her.

The ideal was not a bad sort of creation for a penniless girl to eliminate out of her imagination as suitable for her purpose.

"He must," said Miss Jersey to herself, "be a man of rank, or at least, the eldest son of some very old county family. He must not be more than ten years my senior. I do not so much mind about his being handsome. It is not necessary for both husband and wife to be very good looking, but it is essential that his appearance should be distinguished, his manners polished, and his address free from *mauvaise honte*.

"If I were married to a man such as Mary Carew thought herself fortunate to be able to secure, I should either kill him or run away. To be sure he is a baronet, and has, they say, eighteen thousand a year, but he is a poor little insignificant creature, who looks more like some decrepit old cottager than the owner of Courtlands.

"I do not want to have an accomplished husband, but the man I marry must be well read; understand something about the old masters and modern artists, and com-

prehend, whether he likes music or not, that a sonata of Beethoven's is a thing to be enjoyed. I do hate ignorance in men. It is much worse than ignorance in a woman.

"Of course, also, he must be rich. My ideas are not extravagant; I should say, with the exercise of proper economy, one ought to be able to live in very good style on ten or twelve thousand a year.

"Oh! and another thing, it is essential he should be a member of the Church of England. I could not associate with those dreadful Dissenters, and as for a Free-thinker, like Mr. Morency, it would be vain to dream of achieving social success with a man who advances the opinions he delights to air."

Thus ran Miss Jersey's modest aspirations, and yet, strange to say, neither the man of rank nor the man of family, neither the man of distinguished appearance nor

the individual who, combining all other advantages, added that of a good income, came wooing.

Other girls married to their minds, but Miss Jersey still remained on the shelf; other girls refused suitors she would gladly have accepted, but the rejected lovers did not turn to her for comfort.

The only matrimonial fish that came to her net were not worth landing, and Miss Jersey accordingly cast them adrift with a precipitancy which, if not courteous, was honest. Day after day, month after month, year after year, the lady waited and watched, waited and watched in vain.

Somehow, spite of, or perhaps because of her haughty carriage and handsome face and regal manners, the men she would have cared to marry went further afield, and selected for wives "little chits of girls," "poor weak creatures," "foolish silly wo-

men," and so forth ; and whilst Miss Jersey's eyes flashed more brilliantly than ever, while her black hair shone like the raven's wing, while her carriage became more erect, and her manner more uncompromising, tender souls, with soft low voices and mild doves' eyes, crept into the good places of life and their husbands' hearts at the same time.

Many a love story, however, Miss Jersey marred. If it was not given her to win affection, she could at least often separate those who were fond—not a few of her friends and relations owed the ruin of so much of life's edifice as is built on a man's or a woman's love, to Theresa Jersey.

If she could not have what she wanted herself, she could prevent those who were in a fair way of being happy from becoming so ; and to do Miss Jersey justice, it was through no fault of hers that marriages

wise and marriages foolish were solemnized amongst her acquaintances.

"Were Theresa engaged to the man of her choice," said Grandmamma Jersey, "and he a duke with a rent roll of a thousand a day, she would still try to spoil sport between even such a foolish little baby as Carry Gibbons and that limp young curate from Braiswheat."

Grandmamma Jersey, being over ninety years of age, and in possession of all her faculties, occupied a vantage ground of observation not possessed by her acquaintances, who accordingly regarded her utterances almost, in the light of scriptural revelations.

As for Theresa, if the man of her choice ever came, no one suspected her secret.

The duke did not, at all events, or any one with a rent roll of even a thousand a week; and so she passed with great dignity from girlhood to early womanhood,

and from early womanhood to something verging on thirty, aye, and even beyond thirty, ere she met with the chance of settling suitably.

Of course, being then at least ten years older than that charming age when a girl, feeling she has plenty of time before her, surveys the matrimonial field with a complacency induced by the conviction that it is all before her to pick and to choose, Miss Jersey was resigned to lay aside some of her early fancies and ambitions and make the best of what she could get.

In those days Marion Jersey was a girl, a very beautiful girl, charming in her manners, yet possessed of a certain carriage, almost comical in one of her years, which procured for her the loving nickname of "Stately Marion."

Beside her, one might have thought her cousin would stand but a poor chance; and yet Mr. Lessant chose Theresa, and while he

admired the young girl in her teens, fairly fell down and worshipped the woman who was, he said, "fit to be an empress."

And in truth Theresa was a very fine creature. She had a creamy skin, emulating in its rich whiteness the leaf of the magnolia flower. Her hair was black, with a blue depth of blackness that had no dulness of night about it, but rather spoke of life and light and shifting sunbeams. Her eyebrows were arched to an extent which in any other woman would have suggested an eternal state of astonishment, but, in her, merely indicated a superior and perhaps somewhat contemptuous order of mind. As for her nose, it was, if not Roman, a very decided aquiline, with chin and mouth to match that style of feature.

A handsome, nay, as some humbler admirers said, a splendid woman,—large, shapely, imperious; that was the prize

Mr. Lessant drew out of the matrimonial lottery, and very proud he felt of it.

Though the Jerseys, one and all, went to ruin with that celerity and thoroughness which marks the final exit of some families, Mr. Lessant never lamented his connection with them. In herself, Mrs. Lessant proved a very tower of respectability; what the newly rich man lacked, she supplied. She had birth, and he had money. She had manners, and he had Latimer's old banking establishment. He was rich enough, not indeed to buy the old family estate of the Jerseys, but a slice of it, on which was situated a dilapidated red-brick mansion, surrounded by a pretty wilderness of ground, called the Manse House, which he almost rebuilt, and to which he cut an excellent approach from the main road leading to Dilfield.

“The place ought to be associated with us,” observed Mrs. Lessant, meaning of course the Jerseys. “If you do not re-

christen it, people will forget our family ever existed, especially now that disagreeable little Lord Newlands has bought Littleham;" and obedient to such words of command as chanced to accord with his own opinions, Mr. Lessant re-christened his new residence after his wife's progenitors.

As for the children, the honoured name was perpetuated in their persons. In succession they were baptised, Theresa Jersey, Algernon Jersey, Beatrice Jersey, and Clara Jersey Lessant, so that unless they all died unmarried or childless that patronymic was not likely soon to disappear from all necessary deeds and documents.

At one period of her life, Mrs. Lessant indeed seriously considered the propriety of her husband styling himself Mr. Jersey Lessant, but the practice of changing or adding to surnames, unless indeed some direct pecuniary advantage ensued from doing so, was not in those days regarded with the

favour which attaches to it in these; and as Mr. Lessant refused to comply with his wife's wishes (to "make such a fool of himself," was his terse expression), she had to content herself with changing Lessant into Le Saint, and insisting on her acquaintances doing likewise.

"The name might have been worse," considered the lady, even after some tradesman or labourer had tried her equanimity by speaking of her husband as "Mr. Lessened," that being the popular pronunciation of the word, following the example of the banker himself. "The name might have been worse. Figgins, for example; I wonder if I *could* have married a man called Figgins."

For the man she had married, at any rate Mrs. Lessant entertained a feeling of contempt as thorough as it was ridiculous. He let her have her own way, to an extent the ideal Figgins even might have scoffed at, and

as a natural consequence Mrs. Lessant despised her slave.

If she had been tied for life to some man who would have laughed at her, kept her short of money, proved unfaithful, selfish, cruel, the lady might probably have felt a tender regard, and sincere respect for him ; but as matters stood, she thought very little of her ‘worser’ half, and was at no pains to conceal her opinions. She was of the stuff out of which slaves and despots are developed. If not trampled on she was safe to trample ; and as Mr. Lessant would just as soon have thought of offending one of the bank’s best customers as his wife, he was soon placed in his proper position and kept there.

From the ruling of her servants to the education of her children, Mrs. Lessant never brooked a word of interference. Mr. Lessant would not have ordered out his own carriage without first inquiring his wife’s

pleasure concerning it. To her the gardeners, coachman, and all the other male domestics and labourers looked for orders ; to her the tradespeople sent in their accounts. If it appeared to her that a room required papering, she sent for the decorator and gave her orders with a fine disregard of any other human being's opinions.

Fifty Acts of Parliament could not have rendered Mrs. Lessant more independent of her husband than was the case. Had he beaten her, she might have deferred to him ; as it was, she pooh-poohed him. She had a fine administrative capacity, the usual administrative capacity indeed. It was for others to make, for her to spend.

In a small way, readers, have not we all met with some one able to spend better than ourselves the money we have earned, hardly enough sometimes, God knows !

A man really should be cautious whom he marries ! Once she had secured a help-

meet, Mrs. Lessant's erect figure, her much-arched brows, her dark eyes, her clearly defined features, were things not to be disregarded.

Over other women she had an enormous advantage. She never grew old, she altered her position, but she maintained her ground. Of course she could not always remain at thirty, or even forty years of age ; but somehow, she never attained fifty, not to speak of sixty. Let others of her sex grow grey, feeble, vacillating,—of Mrs. Lessant, dark-haired, erect of figure, certain of step, decided in her opinions, you were sure. She was never ill, for example. Occasionally it happens that the mistresses of households have headaches or colds, but no such respite ever was vouchsafed to the domestics of Jersey House. Their lady was always to the front, their lady was always on the *qui vive*.

Every morning, hail, shine, or snow, Mrs.

Lessant's maid found her able to rise and be dressed. Merely as a variety it might have been pleasant had she occasionally been ill ; but she never was ill, except upon those occasions when society has ordained it the right thing to be invisible. Mrs. Lessant never succumbed to indisposition. Society knew that Mrs. Lessant was about to add to the inhabitants of this world ; society, in a discreet and orthodox fashion, learned that Mrs. Lessant had fulfilled her mission.

Ere long, people were informed that Mrs. Lessant was "sitting up," had received, been churched, and so forth. These were necessary incidents common to the married life of the strictest of matrons, and dear Mrs. Lessant made as little of them as any woman in her rank could do.

And here, as in everything else she undertook, Mrs. Lessant hit the happy mean. It was right to have children, and Mrs. Lessant had them. Again, it was a good thing

not to have too many children ; four, Mrs. Lessant's friends decided was just a nice number. Four could not be accounted too large a family if they all grew up ; and if anything untoward happened, why, one or two taken to a better world, would still leave enough to perpetuate their admirable mother's virtues in this. Again, it seemed only fitting that there should be a son capable of filling his father's shoes in the matter of the Hillfordshire Bank ; and yet it was well there were not two boys, for in that case jealousies and heartburnings might have ensued,—while, as for the girls, nothing could be better than three. The two younger seemed intended by heaven as companions for each other, and the eldest daughter was of course destined to be a friend to her mother.

Thus the Dilfield ladies babbled on, and Mrs. Lessant listened approvingly. After all, the voice of utter folly carries

a certain charm with it when engaged in sounding the praises of even a sensible listener.

Mrs. Goose's cackle has a sweet ring to the ear of maiden, statesman, author, or warrior, when it finds occupation for its tones in saying, "How pretty you looked last night, my dear!" "What a magnificent speech you made at Blanktown! I read it every word before I closed my eyes last night."

"Where did you get your heroine? the very most charming woman ever portrayed in fiction." "Is this really the darling creature that carried you through that dreadful, dreadful charge? I never can think of it without almost bursting into tears."

Ah! how easy it is to smile when we hear these, and such-like utterances, addressed to our neighbours; but how sweet they seem when addressed to us without any envious listener near at hand to joke at our credu-

lity. Such soft flatteries should always be secret as lovers' vows.

After all, how would the tenderest cooings of lovers sound if murmured in the whispering gallery of St. Paul's.

When her children grew up, the same Society that had lauded her selection as to number and sex, found still more to praise in the manner in which the "young people" disproved the truth of all prophecies prophesied concerning them.

Miss Lessant and her mother saw as little of each other as was compatible with living in the same house, and notoriously they never agreed except when pulling some obnoxious friend to pieces. Miss Lessant and Beatrice stabled their horses together. So far as it was possible for two of Mrs. Lessant's daughters to be fond of each other, Trixy and Tessy proved congenial spirits.

Their views about men and women, more particularly men, were identical. Mutually

they looked down on their father, and understood their mother perfectly. They despised their brother as much as he disliked them. And they considered their unfortunate relationship to Clara a sufficient punishment for all the sins that from childhood up could be laid to their charge.

And Society with a sleek smile said, “It is *so* nice to see sisters united ;” and Mrs. Lessant, who would have died ere acknowledging a disappointment in one of her children, smilingly agreed with Society.

In the same way when Algernon flatly refused to have anything to do with “the shop,” and elected to give the bar such benefit as might be supposed to attach to his talents, Society opined that “perhaps on the whole it was better the young man had not taken kindly to business. Sometimes sons and fathers did not take precisely the same views, did not in fact see things with the same eyes, and if hereafter Mr. Alger-

non should incline to take an active part in the bank, why his legal knowledge would prove an enormous advantage to the concern, whilst as regarded Clara, Society said, though not in Mrs. Lessant's hearing, it was a comfort she remained a child for such a length of time, since it might have been awkward for three Miss Lessants to be on the matrimonial stock-exchange together.

That little mischance of having at one time three daughters out of their teens unengaged, was indeed a very bitter drop in Mrs. Lessant's cup.

Of course, she said she did not want to lose her dear girls, and equally of course no one believed her. There are mothers who either from excessive fondness for their daughters, or from having endured much misery in their married lives, do really dread the sight of wooers; but the person who believed Mrs. Lessant desired her "dear girls" to remain under the parental roof

till they dropped into the sere and yellow leaf of confirmed spinsterhood, must have been credulous indeed.

For Mrs. Lessant was a very far-sighted and very worldly woman. She understood as well as anybody living that girls equally with things cannot remain stationary, that what is admirable to-day is not admirable say in a year's time, that in the natural course of events it is best for women to marry and find their happiness away from their father's house.

Old maidenhood was not one of those institutions which had ever impressed Mrs. Lessant with a sense of its fitness and beauty.

While her girls were young, it was all very well for them to remain single, but no one knew better than Mrs. Lessant how quickly time slips by when it is engaged in making a woman old, and it was not without a feeling of bitter mortification that

as months grew into years, she found her daughters as far as ever from being engaged, or likely to be engaged to any one in her opinion worth having.

They could have married it is true, but Mrs. Lessant had no idea of her children "throwing themselves away" on poor curates, briefless barristers, younger sons, and such-like ineligible suitors. The wisest of women do on occasions make mistakes, however, and Mrs. Lessant once made a fatal mistake.

When Theresa was in her teens, there came to Dilfield a young deacon who fell straightway in love with the banker's daughter. He had no money, and no expectation of money. He possessed some influential friends, however, and it was on the cards that those friends might help him to a living, if his own talents, which were not remarkable, failed to do so. Meantime he and Miss Theresa settled that it would

be proper and prudent for them to marry when he took priest's orders ; that upon his curacy, and what "papa would allow," they could live very comfortably ; and that if his own family did not put something good in his way, "papa" could and would buy him a nice little advowson. As for "mamma," her probable opinions were ignored by the young couple. They tacitly avoided speaking about what she might think, but they decided that to "save all fuss, and a great deal of expense," they would be married quietly at a little church some ten miles distant, whenever Tessy came of age.

Before that time the future bridegroom expected to receive a few hundred pounds, which was his share of a sum left for division amongst his brothers and sisters, when the youngest attained his majority, and with this amount Tessy and her lover meant to furnish a pretty cottage and live as "simply as possible."

"I am sure we neither of us care for eating," said Tessy valiantly.

"And my clothes need not cost much," continued the young man, "and you look lovely in white muslin."

That was the best part of Tessy's life, foolish, unpractical, a trifle undutiful it may be, though she had no thought of being so, but it came to an end suddenly.

Mrs. Lessant somehow got an inkling of the state of affairs, and—interfered.

She first appealed to the rector, who being single, and somewhat of a book-worm, did not perceive that there was much need for him to meddle in the matter.

"What can I do, my dear madam," he asked piteously. "There is nothing unsound about the young man's theology; if he wants to marry your daughter, why should he not? He is a gentleman and a scholar, and will no doubt do very well in the Church. I really fail to see the

discrepancy in position you seem to imagine exists."

Foiled at the rectory, Mrs. Lessant took herself to the palace. As a Christian, no doubt the bishop's better half sympathized with the curate, but as a mother her heart bled for Mrs. Lessant.

In solemn consultation the two ladies decided the thing must not be, and accordingly the young man was spoken to by the bishop, and the young woman by her mamma. She was sent abroad for a time with some friends, who were, said Mrs. Lessant, "providentially" starting for Switzerland and Italy, and when at the end of six months she returned to Dilfield, the curate was gone, a gentleman with grey hair, a shrewish wife and seven children, having taken his place.

The young deacon was the only man who ever proposed for Miss Lessant, that took her fancy. He was her first love

and her last. Other men whom she might have loved, had they cared for her, maintained a discreet distance. This happened to be the little story in her life, which made Miss Lessant human, though at rare intervals.

Had worldly bitterness not intermingled in that cup, she might have been human always.

Thus the bitterness mixed itself with her poor little love story. By some irony of fate, which Mrs. Lessant never forgave, ere seven years had passed, the poor insignificant deacon was described in the Clergy List as the Rev. Sir Claude Marlin, Rector of Great Craisford. The rectory was a poor thing, worth no more than three hundred and twenty pounds a year, but the lands and estates which came with his secular title, produced a rent-roll of something like fifteen thousand. Poor Mrs. Lessant, poor Miss Theresa ! If upon no

other point, there was one upon which Mrs. Lessant, her son, and two eldest daughters, were thoroughly in accord,—condemnation of Mr. Lessant. It was not merely that Mr. Lessant did many things wrong, but in the eyes of his wife and three of his children, he did nothing right. Ere this, it has been intimated that though the banker possessed brains enough to acquire the luxuries of life, he had not sufficient perception to naturalize himself in its refinements. This is a contradiction which the casual observer finds extremely hard to reconcile, and yet it is a contradiction which meets him every day. As for the close observer it hurts him. If you once take the trouble of reducing everything to line and plummet, it seems grievous when the result proves diametrically opposite to that which you expected.

Doctor Samuel Johnson, for instance, that man of magnificent capacity, of inordinate power, able to undertake tasks of gigantic

capacity, never so mastered the smaller details of life, as to be able to eat like a civilized being. He could define the meaning of words, but he failed to illustrate how a gentleman should eat. He recognized the social mistake Mrs. Thrale committed in her marriage with Signor Piozzi, but he could never correct the personal habit of swilling his own food like a hog.

And yet this man, in most respects, was a king amongst men. He talked as we should like to talk, he argued as we should wish to argue. He wrote as we would give worlds to write, and he has left a name which shall live on men's tongues, when ours, yours and mine, reader, shall on some stupid head-stone be scarcely legible ; and yet, and yet, because while he was still alive he ate like a pig, and comported him after the fashion of a bear, he was thought as little of in that "Society" in which, spite of all his intellectual capacity, he might have liked.

to mix, as Mr. Lessent was in the bosom of his family.

In his way the good generous doctor could earn money : earn perhaps a fair income for those primitive days. Likewise Mr. Lessent could make a handsome sum per annum, and yet the great man, and the little one, who had only in the way of success that solitary talent in common, were identical in many of their personal habits.

For ever Mrs. Lessent might have instructed her husband in the ways of civilized society, and for ever like the deaf adder he would have refused to listen. In 'His Enemy's Daughter' there is a touch I particularly admire, namely, when the *quondam* carpenter goes back over his R's and H's in order to say them correctly.

The man who tried his horse again at that fence must have had the best of stuff in his nature, for men as a rule differ from women in this, that they can never perceive

the defects of their earlier training. And so to come back to our sheep ; after thirty-five years of married life Mrs. Lessant was fain to confess her husband understood no more of civilized dining than he did when he and she first became acquainted.

She had hoped to "mould him," but found that an impossible process. She had hoped to educate him up. He, poor gentleman, found it hard enough to keep himself and affairs going without troubling his head to master the social unities.

The bank and its belongings, Jersey House and the necessities appertaining thereto, his wife and her dress, his daughters and their dress ; all these anxieties and indispensables seemed to him sufficient evil for the day, without the harass of considering how he should eat of the good things set before him.

Further, undoubtedly, there was to Mr. Lessant's mind, an antagonism between

those who ate their food in what he described as a "niminy-piminy" way, and the men and women who "had no nonsense about them."

The affectation of feeding is trying to many minds wise enough in other respects; and Mr. Lessant because he "hated," naturally enough, "to see pampered fools toying with good food," personally treated good food as a cat does a mouse, and literally devoured it.

To this peculiarity, and to other peculiarities, belonging to the same family, Mrs. Lessant ascribed the fact that she had never really compassed an entrance into what she called "good society."

Many gentlemen and gentlewomen visited at, and were visited by the Lessants, but what the banker's wife desired was a close intimacy with the county families. To her there was an indescribable charm about the word duchess, and if she had resided in the

neighbourhood of Windsor Castle, her soul would have sickened to remember she had never been so honoured as to dine there.

The curious part of the matter was, that though the county people were very fairly civil to her, she never felt satisfied with the nature of their attentions. They called on her, at long intervals it is true, but still they did call. If they happened to be out, as indeed they almost always were when she returned their visits, that surely could not be imputed to them as a sin. Occasionally Mr. and Mrs. Lessant were solemnly invited to dinner, and if an election were expected, or that for any other reason a great party were necessary, the Misses Lessant and their brother received cards, and duly made their appearance at the Marquis of Hillford's or Lord Dilfield's or His Grace the Duke of Landshire's.

People who were not of sufficient dis-

tinction to be asked to the grand lawn party, or the select archery meeting, but only to the monster ball, or fête to which everybody who was nobody had an invitation, seeing Mrs. Lessant and her husband and her offspring driving off to the Court, or the Hall, or the Place, felt mighty envious of the Jersey House folks, and were utterly unconscious that the banker's wife was as much dissatisfied as Haman himself could have been under similar circumstances, because her daughters were never entreated to stay for a few days, or even one day, with the Ladies Geraldine and Emily, and because she herself was not treated as the bosom friend of their titled mammas.

It was a beautiful trait in Mrs. Lessant's character that she never underrated her own merits. For her, nothing could in her opinion have been too good or too great. Had the Queen commanded her presence at

Balmoral for a month's close association with royalty, she would not have attributed the attention to Her Majesty's condescension, but regarded it merely as a graceful recognition of her own superior qualities. Let who else be wrong, Mrs. Lessant was always right. Never had Mrs. Lessant made a mistake. Her moves were always the best on the board. If she was checkmated, defeat arose from entirely extraneous circumstances, over which she had no possible control. Her admirable opinion of herself included likewise, though perhaps in a lesser degree, her daughters Theresa and Beatrice, and her son Algernon Jersey. As for Clara, she took after her father, a matter to be deplored of course; but one for which Mrs. Lessant was not accountable.

The bitterest drop in her cup was, that although men came and men went, those she desired for her daughters never proposed.

Admirers they had or had had by the score, lovers also in plenty. Many a sleepless night had honest young fellows passed, thinking over the charms of their unkind mistresses. Many a *mauvais quart d'heure* had ineligibles suffered in Jersey House while Miss Theresa or Miss Beatrice was saying "No" in as many words as possible; but the eligibles did not propose; the eligibles "courted and rode away," they amused themselves with the grace and beauty of the young ladies; they drank Mr. Lessant's wine, which was of excellent quality; they did ample justice to the various dishes sent up by his cook; they opened accounts at his bank; they frequently borrowed money on mortgage; they made themselves very agreeable to Mrs. Lessant, and ultimately they went away or married some girl to whom they had been engaged for Heaven knows how long.

Officers, enough to have commanded all

the troops at Waterloo, had at one time and another partaken of the hospitalities of Jersey House. Clergymen, sufficient to have filled all the sinecures in England, had, following clerical custom, duly left Mr. Lessant's decanters empty. Lords, not a few, had enabled the young ladies to ascertain how inane the talk of even an earl's son may be on occasion ; whilst untitled, but still most desirable *partis*, had over and over again raised the hopes of mother and daughters, only to dash them unceremoniously to the ground.

"It is all your papa's fault," said Mrs. Lessant to Beatrice, after a more than usually promising young officer of substance wrote to inform them how sorry he felt at having been compelled to leave Dilfield without saying good-bye in person to friends who had treated him with such kindness and cordiality.

"He says he is nothing but a man of

business which is true enough unfortunatly - and yet still he absolutely refuses to state what he is willing to settle upon you. Of course these things get talked of, and one cannot blame any one for thinking twice ere proposing for a girl who has been accustomed to every luxury, and yet whose father refuses to mention the amount he is willing to settle upon her."

Mrs. Lessant was indescribably indignant when she made this remark, for her husband had not half an hour previously opposed to her expostulations and reproaches the pertinent observation :

" Surely, my dear, when the man has plenty of money of his own, and no one to control his actions, he might have proposed for Trixy without exactly knowing the amount of her *dot*. If you remember, Legerton asked Marion to marry him, though she had not a brass farthing for her fortune ; and though you tell me I should

not talk about myself, still I suppose you will not mind my just saying that I married you for love, and not for the sake of anything except yourself, or anything you were ever likely to bring to the common fund."

There are times when a worm will turn, we are informed. There were times in the secret history of Jersey House when even Mrs. Lessant turned. This was one of the occasions ; and though he did not say much, Mrs. Lessant, always regarding him as an extremely poor and humiliating sort of worm to have anything to do with, felt his rebellion bitterly.

She could not tell him she had been possessed of even enough money to buy her *trousseau*, because he had paid for the whole of her not inexpensive outfit. She could not say in accepting him she had lost her chance of marrying better, since it was a fact that when Mr. Lessant came wooing she

had not a single lover left she could play against him. It was impossible for her to remark that she had made her husband, for most undoubtedly his success was established before he ever proposed to her, and nothing therefore remained but to say the cases were not analogous, to which observation Mr. Lessant made answer, that apparently they were not, indeed.

"I was fond enough of you, my dear," he went on, proceeding to demonstrate the truth of this statement, "and evidently Newart does not care a snap of his fingers about Trixy."

Then Mrs. Lessant's spirit waxed hot within her.

"If you glory in vulgarity, Mr. Lessant," she said, "and take a fiendish pleasure in seeing your children slighted, it is quite time our conversation ended."

"By Jove," muttered the banker, as he

watched his wife sweeping out of the room; "by Jove, it seems to me that as a rule our conversation usually partakes confoundedly of the character of a monologue."

CHAPTER VII.

A MORNING WALK.

TIME went on, but the Misses Lessant did not go off. Even the eldest was still a belle; for there are some women men admire almost to the end, and Theresa Lessant was one of those ladies who are never neglected at balls, picnics, races, or dinner parties.

About Dilfield it was considered the correct thing to pay great attention to Miss Lessant and her beautiful sister. Theresa was by far the most talkative and agreeable of the two, and therefore, though she did not possess any charm of youth, she had

that which, to gentlemen with no matrimonial views, often agreeably makes up for the want of it, a fluent tongue, inspired by a ready wit.

Miss Lessant had not gone into society for more years than she cared to count without deriving benefit from long experience. She knew what to do, what to say, when to walk, when to sit still, and in consequence there was what some people called "a great repose" about Miss Lessant, who made herself pleasant out of doors if she sometimes failed to do so at home.

But undeniably she was passing into the old maidenhood stage of life. She felt herself that unless she chose to encourage some foolish young curate, or beardless ensign, or embryo baby barrister, marriage for her was now out of the question. She had lived her day, and matrimonially it proved a failure. Well, life as a rule is failure, and Miss Lessant accepted the

position bravely, if not amiably. She did not make a fool of herself by trying to enter the lists against new-comers, younger and fairer than she could ever hope to be again. She dropped into her appointed place as if she had selected it of her own free choice. She smiled when men sought her; she smiled when men left her. In society she was always pleasant in her manner, and pleasant in her conversation, always anxious to "make points" for her sister, and ready to lend a helping hand in any business the younger lady had on the *tapis* which promised a desirable result.

Quite honestly Miss Lessant desired that Trix should marry, and marry well. For her own sake and for that of the family she wished the number of possible spinsters to be reduced. She had all her mother's cold worldly wisdom joined to somewhat less than her mother possessed of jealous selfishness.

Domestically she was a hateful woman ; but she was not so hateful as Mrs. Lessant or her sister, who, under an exterior of almost divine beauty, concealed a heart as shallow, as false, and as incapable of really loving any single thing on earth as ever was owned by woman.

Men apparently guessed this, for Beatrice occupied, as compared to Theresa, the same position as Saul did when the women of Israel sounded his praise and that of the sweet singers in one breath.

Beatrice ought to have done great things in the lover-slaying line ; but she proved even a greater failure than her sister ; not a male soul who could have kept her even in suitable bonnet strings — those were the days of bonnet strings, reader—came to the front ; not a creature for whom she could have thought of allowing herself to care for a moment had ever made actual love to the beautiful Miss Lessant, when all of a sud-

den Mr. Carder, the son of Mr. Lessant's partner, appeared as a suitor.

He was not what she wanted and had expected. Excepting that his half sister possessed a large fortune and a beautiful little estate called Elm Vale, he was in no way richer or rarer than the Lessants. Nevertheless, Miss Beatrice accepted him.

Mr. Lessant wished her to do so, and for once she obeyed her father. Mrs. Lessant weighed the matter; argued out its *pros* and *cons*, and with many sighs, remembering the "bird in the hand" proverb, said, "It is *wretched* of course, but if your father *will* not say how much fortune he is prepared to give you, something had better be done by somebody."

Miss Lessant kindly observed,

"He is as unstable as water and as fickle as the wind; but you will do well to marry him, Trix. Don't live with his sister; never let him have his own way; if you feel

jealous don't show it, but treat him as you would a child or an idiot, and you may be quite as happy as married people generally are."

The opinion of Algernon Jersey Lessant was not asked on the question, but he volunteered a letter which set forth "that he considered the match a desirable one; his father could not last for ever, and it was well to have *one* husband in the family whose interests would be identical with theirs."

Algernon Lessant was as great a fool as the Almighty in the course of His visitations upon the sins of this earth ever permitted to be created; but fools very frequently speak hard truths, and his letter set Mrs. Lessant thinking.

What she thought about has little to do with this story, except that she grew a little more disagreeable than heretofore to her lord and master, and that she frequently expressed her deep regret that Trixy's

marriage had not taken place before old Mr. Carder's death.

"If the stupid young man had only proposed two months sooner, Trix might have been settled long ago," she said to Miss Lessant.

"I don't think the stupid young man had the slightest idea of proposing two months or two days before his father's death," retorted Miss Lessant incisively. "I fancy he was then much more wedded to the society of his brother officers than he is ever likely to be to that of his wife."

At home Miss Lessant was not given to genial utterances. She had no idea of humouring her family by saying, "Peace ! peace !" when there was no peace. She possessed a mass of common sense ; but common sense, when uttered in the plainest of plain words, is not always pleasant sense ; and Mrs. Lessant, though possibly no coward, very frequently wooed her

daughter to silence by evading the preferred encounter and refusing to ask what she meant.

There are, besides, truths to which it is sometimes quite as well to shut one's eyes, and Mrs. Lessant felt that no good could possibly accrue from a strict investigation of the amount of affection Mr. Carder entertained for her second daughter.

He was of suitable age—good-looking—a gentleman—popular in the neighbourhood—amiable, and sufficiently well off. His father's first wife had been a woman not merely of some rank, but of considerable fortune; and that fact was dwelt upon at Dilfield somewhat to the ignoring of Mr. Carder's second and very ill-assorted union with a little fair-haired, foolish girl young enough to be his daughter, and who would, the world said, have brought scandal to every one connected with her, had she not died a couple of months after the

birth of her first child, who grew up straight, tall, and handsome, petted by his half-sister, and indulged by his father.

His choice of a profession, while it disappointed Mr. Carder, delighted his sister. After doing very good things at the university, he suddenly grew weary of learning. A sedentary life, he said, he could not and would not endure; and accordingly a commission was bought for him, which step entailed his seeing very little of Dilfield for several years.

It may be questioned, however, whether Arthur Carder liked soldiering so well as he fancied would have proved the case. Essentially he was a man born to love lotus-eating, and the atmosphere of Elm Vale where he spent most of his earlier years, was not calculated to correct that defect. It was a place in which to dream away life, certainly not one to turn out a worker, and before he had been long with

his regiment, every one of his fellow-officers knew "Carder would never do anything."

Not even in the way of wild extravagance or mad debauchery. There are men of whom it may safely be prophesied that they will never sink very low or rise very high; that where you see them now, there they will remain, filling their place in the world with a certain amount of credit; but while making the world no worse, certainly adding very little either to its advancement or its happiness.

If he rose in the army, every one believed it would only be by purchase or influence; but whilst every one in this respect was right, it must be remembered that no heavy bills were sent to Dilfield for settlement, that he very rarely exceeded the very handsome allowance his father made him, and that the Jews were by no means so familiar with his signature as some of them would have liked.

All at once, however, a great change occurred in his position—his father lay dying, and the son, fast as he hastened to Dilfield, failed to see him alive. He felt this deeply, for he was a man possessed of strong family affections, and before the first vehemence of his grief had subsided, Mrs. Lessant got possession of him.

Jersey House was a pleasant change from Elm Vale—Miss Lessant's cheerful talk a relief after the sound of his sister's tear-filled voice. He acquired the habit of going very frequently to the Bank, and of spending almost every evening with Mr. Lessant's family, till the world began to say there would surely soon be one Miss Lessant the less—and one Mrs. Carder the more.

Before, however, these things came to pass, an event took place which did surprise Dilfield very greatly. Mr. Carder expressed his intention of exchanging his

sword for a pen—sold his commission—took up his permanent residence with his sister, and quickly fitted his feet into his father's shoes at the Bank.

After that he proposed for Miss Beatrice, and was accepted. The marriage could not well take place under a twelvemonth from the time of Mr. Carder's death; and, as Miss Carder considered eighteen months a more suitable period, matters were arranged accordingly.

Society, understanding it was a match agreeable to the feelings of every one interested, kindly gave its own approval to the project.

“ So suitable in all respects.”

“ Wonder it never occurred to us that such a marriage would be the very best thing possible.”

“ Miss Beatrice is wise to accept some one before she loses her beauty, as her sister has done.”

"They are finding out now it is not prudent to overstay one's market."

Such and such like observations were made by the upper and lower ranks of Society in and around Dilfield ; then the nine days' talk subsided—then things settled back into their usual level at Jersey House ; and it was an understood thing when Honoria arrived at Dilfield, that, it being then the summer after old Mr. Carder's death, Trixy was to be married early in the following spring.

The day was not fixed, but the time might be considered approximately arranged.

This, then—with the fresh element of discord introduced by Mr. Lessant's ill-timed invitation to his nephew—was the household in which Honoria awoke on the morning after her arrival at Dilfield. She had slept long and dreamlessly, and opened her eyes to find the window she had

the night before thrown wide, shut closely, and the sun trying to make its way through blinds arranged so as to almost exclude every ray of light.

It was still very early; but during the few years of her life, Honoria had been in the habit of rising with the lark, and, as on the previous evening, she had literally gone to bed with the lamb, she at once got up, and with eager hands drew back the curtains, drew up the blinds, and opened her windows. There seemed a strange sense of unreality about herself and her surroundings. At first it seemed to her like a dream to remember that only twenty-four short hours previously she had awakened in her own home, with the sound of the sea rippling over the gravelly beach, making music in her ears—with the perfume of the roses and the honeysuckles filling the air—with the scent of new-mown hay stealing upon the fresh morning wind into her room.

As she looks down upon the smoothly-shaven turf and the great dark cedar-tree, she can with her mind's eye see that room distinctly—a long, low chamber, with a broad, old-fashioned casement, two heavy beams running across the ceiling, and an oaken floor, only partially covered by a carpet from which the original pattern has almost disappeared. In one corner is her little French bedstead with its snowy counterpane and hangings; opposite stands an old-fashioned wardrobe, which, when opened, gives forth a fragrance born of centuries of lavender flowers. Near the window is an ancient dressing-table, with brass mountings and spindly legs. The glass is small, oval, and covered with disfiguring blotches; but it has for so many years given back the best reflection it could to Honie's happy face, that she looks upon it in the light of an old friend.

Another table—this an old pembroke—



stands in the middle of the room, and upon it are ranged with all a young girl's pride even in her poorest possessions, a dilapidated desk, a large glass ink-bottle as big as a moderate-sized tumbler and as substantial as the monument, a few books treating of the mysteries of thorough bass, a 'Life of Beethoven,' 'Consuelo,' Czerny on musical composition, a few sheets of music paper, and two or three volumes of poetry.

All the other appointments of the apartment belong to the same simple school, and yet it seems beautiful and familiar to Honoria's memory as she turns from the contemplation of the cedar-tree, and compares her bedchamber at Antlet Cottage with the grandeur and the luxury of the room assigned to her at Jersey House.

Poor child! for a minute she felt very lonely and desolate, very much in want of a sight of her mother, very much ashamed of her illness the previous evening, nervous

when she thought of the state of her wardrobe. But after that period of despondency she plucked up enough courage to dress herself, which she accomplished, humming the while snatches of song that were as familiar to her as the notes of a thrush to his mate.

Whilst so engaged there came to the door, first a cautious tap, and then a whispered “May I come in,” succeeded in due time by a vision of Clara arrayed in a pretty morning dress, shawl, and bonnet.

“ You naughty girl !” exclaimed this young lady, “ what do you mean by making such a noise. It is lucky for you that mine is the next room, or you would have had the establishment turn and rend you for disturbing their virtuous slumbers. Are you better ? Should you like to come out for a walk ? It is just six o'clock, and even the kitchenmaid has not put in an appearance. Put on your bonnet, and walk as quiet

as a mouse or you will waken all the babies."

"Babies! What babies? I did not know there were any here."

"What a funny girl you are! I mean our elderly babies—mamma and papa, and Tessy and Trix and the cook, and all the rest of them. Are you ready? Then come. And so saying Clara took her new friend by the hand and stole softly along the broad corridor and down the staircase and across the inner hall to a door which opened into a walk shaded by laurels and rhododendrons.

"Isn't it delicious?" asked Clara stopping when they were well away from the house and pausing to inhale the fresh morning air. "This is the only time in all the day when one has even a chance of taking a comfortable walk. I suppose you are always up early and away down on the shore or else wandering over the cliffs.

How I envy you your wild free life! It seems to me sometimes as if the eternal propriety and strait-lacedness of our house were suffocating me. I am sure if mamma were Empress of all the Russias she could not insist more strongly than is the case on forms and ceremonies and all details of etiquette."

"Clara."

"Yes, dear."

"If I ask you something, will you promise me not to laugh?"

"I will not if I can help it; but you must not ask me anything very ridiculous, because what Tessy says is quite true, I am always giggling. Now what is it?"

"I want you to tell me if my face looks very, very red this morning. I was afraid to look in the glass myself; but still I should so like to know."

"Turn more to the light—more still," said Clara gravely; then added, "you are

getting redder and redder. A minute ago your cheeks were the colour of the dining-room curtains, and now they are redder than any peony. Nonsense, child, it is only my folly. Your face would be well enough if you could only be induced to keep the backs of your hands at a respectful distance from it. By the way, mamma says you have not the Jersey hands."

"I have nothing good or nice about me," cried Honoria in despair.

"Yes, you have," said Clara, "you have us for relations, and we are all so good and nice and amiable ourselves that, perhaps, you may catch some of our admirable qualities and become almost as perfect as we are. Why, there is Tom!" she exclaimed as that young gentleman crossed the path and disappeared from view. "Tom—Tom, come back. Don't be silly. It's only Honie. There is not a living soul with us but our own two selves."

Thus exhorted, Tom emerged from an ambuscade of bay-trees, laurels, and evergreen oak, and, looking very sheepish, hoped Miss Legerton had quite recovered from her faintness.

"Call her Honie," suggested the youngest Miss Lessant.

"Your mamma might not like me to do so."

"If she did not, that would be all the more reason why you should," observed Clara calmly, "but she will not object—no fear of that—and Honie likes it. Say you do, there's a dear," she added, pinching her relative's arm.

"Of course I do not mind, as you all are so good to me," agreed Honie, with touching simplicity.

"Hem!" remarked Clara demonstratively, "now let us get on; we are not going to stand here all the morning, I suppose."

So they went on, across the high-road,

over delicious field-paths, through lanes bordered by giant trees and tiny wild flowers, between banks tangled with holly, dog-roses, clematis, gorse, and blackberry bushes.

“Not beautiful ! How could Mr. Warren call such a country ugly !” Honoria, who loved with a touching affection even “lady’s-smocks” and “buttercups,” could have almost cried for delight as she stopped continually to gather the familiar flowers and kiss their faces still wet and shining with dew.

Her floral proclivities were regarded by her companions with patience, not to say pleasure. It was good to know, for the third in a piece only set for two performers, any one content to drop so entirely out of the music. Honoria was always behind, climbing some bank, examining some blossom, searching for birds’ nests, hunting for rare ferns, whilst they walked on a score

or so of yards ahead, or waited for her with marked toleration written on their countenances.

"Tell," Clara had said at an early stage of the walk to her youthful admirer. "Tell, indeed, that is all you men know about girls. Why, how long has she been with us? About six-and-twenty hours, and out of that time one has had the pleasure of her society for, say, one hundred and twenty minutes. Well, I would already trust her with my life."

"Your faith is very great, Clara," answered the young man.

"Would you wish it to be less?" she asked; and then some little bye-play took place, which, had Honie been nearer to where they stood hand in hand, looking down from among the trees to a trickling brook, would have told even her they were lovers.

Walking on at length for a few minutes

all side by side, talking merrily about nothing, and making among them the sweet harmonies youth alone can sing in perfect tune, they met a gentleman arrayed in a loose suit of grey, not then so usual or so fashionable a mode of male attire as it has since become.

Many a year ago, during a happy visit spent in the Redgauntlet and the Burns country, I remember being present at a trial which concerned a robbery that had taken place during the youngest hours of the morning, if indeed not at midnight itself.

In the course of that trial various intelligent witnesses gave evidence, witnesses such as in their class are perhaps met with nowhere out of Scotland, at once accurate and acute.

The strongest impression, however, that trial left on my mind is, that the inhabitants of the particular town, where certain goods were stolen, were one and all in

the habit of getting up or going out at the most unheard-of hours for the purpose of "taking a stroll," getting "a breath of air," "talking to some crony," and so forth.

In the very middle of the night they seemed to like leaving their beds, or of not going to them at all, for the purpose of walking "south" or "west," as each man's special proclivities led him; and this reminiscence so far bears on this story, that if Honoria Legerton had been asked the next morning after her arrival at Dilfield, "What are the distinguishing peculiarities of Dilfield?" she would have answered, "I only know of one, all the pleasant people get up at hours unheard of elsewhere, and go out walking, and make themselves agreeable."

"Well, Arthur, and what are you about?" asked the youngest of Mrs. Lessant's family, greeting the new arrival.

"Well, Clara, and what are you about?"

retorted Mr. Carder, shaking hands with Honoria.

"Giving our country cousin the benefit of a little fresh air," answered Clara. "She was so ill last night she could eat no dinner, and had to be trotted up to bed, consequently I took pity upon her, and here we are."

"Out for a constitutional? May I join you?"

"May you? of course; only too delighted, but remember you must be discreet."

"Am I not always discreet?"

"Undoubtedly, but now there is a fresh burden laid upon you. A young idea has to be instructed."

"I decline that task, Clara," he answered. "You must teach for yourself,—I wash my hands of that part of the programme."

"All the better," she answered gaily, "you would make but a sorry schoolmaster."

"Will you come and have some breakfast at Elm Vale?" he asked.

"I only wish I dare," said Clara. "No, we must soon turn back. We will only walk so far as your gates; and then, heigho! for Jersey House, and all the Jersey unities."

"You are irreverent, Clara."

"If I am, take Honie for your companion, and leave us in disgrace to follow."

Mr. Carder shook his head in reproof, but obeyed orders; and while he and Honoria strolled on in front, Clara and Mr. Fleming fell behind as far as they possibly could.

Only a raw young girl to talk to. Only a girl who could not save her life have uttered the sentences which flowed so glibly off Clara's accustomed tongue.

Well-a-day, girls must begin to try to talk some time, and Mr. Carder, drawing the country cousin out, strove to acquaint her with a portion of the process that morning.

What did he say? Nothing, you may be sure, at all remarkable for wit or wisdom. Nevertheless, Honoria thought his conversation belonged to a very high order indeed.

He spoke of the wild flowers she held in her hand ; and knowing as little about their names, and the legends attached to them, as any gentleman, not botanically inclined, usually does, he afforded her easily enough an admirable opportunity of instructing his ignorance.

If you give a girl no dances, no young companions, no dogs, no wild rides across country, no boat, no anything under heaven save that which is perhaps the best for her—a life full of love, yet destitute of all excitement, the mental and physical exuberance which is part and parcel of that spring time of existence, must find some employment, and Honoria had found hers in the closest and most accurate study of NATURE, which

after all, is a counterfeit of the finest
ART.

Had God given her genius as a painter, she could not have felt more intensely the beauty of meadows studded with buttercups and fringed with hawthorn hedges ; the glory of cliff and strand and sea, more than was the case. To no Academician did the rolling waves ever reveal the materials for a finer picture than the angry billows did to Honie Legerton ; whilst as for poetry, has she not walked along the sands alone in the moonlight vaguely comprehending what lines might be written about the scene, if only—happy conjunction—the souls of feeling and of expression could unite and bring forth offspring ?

Give her the leaf of any tree she had ever seen, and Honoria Legerton could tell you its common name. At the first note of a bird, she would pause and whisper with a tender smile,

"Hark! that is the reed sparrow," or "Listen to that sweet linnet," or "An ousel thrush must have its nest near here," or "There is the dear little kitty wren," the time an uninitiated audience could not discriminate between nightingale and cock robin, save of the particular hour at which each address an audience.

A mode of selection, I may remark, sometimes adopted, and with a good affectation of knowledge, by critics.

As for animals, was there a mood or tense of their wordless grammar unfamiliar to this girl whose life had been so bare of everything most lives have, and so full of all most lives lack? Scarcely, I think.

In their own language horses and dogs talked to her. The only charm Antlet Farm held for her, lay in its dumb population.

Mr. Warren said a country life had no

attraction for her, and in one sense this was perfectly true.

The practical part of country life was simply abhorrent to her young mind and artistic temperament, but the poetical portion seemed to her like a beautiful idyl.

That a pig should weigh twenty stone, or "stun," as Mr. Warren technically pronounced the word, appeared to Honoria's want of common sense a matter to be regretted. When a bullock was fit for the slaughter, the girl could have wept. Horrible to her ideas of beauty were the ploughed fields of Antlet Farm, albeit the sower was sowing in them the seeds of future stacks, destined to look at once picturesque and home-like.

But the things of which she never wearied were the downy chickens and the fluffy ducklings, the baby gallinos scuttling away at her approach, the awkward calves with

their soft reproachful eyes ; the lambs, some of which would nestle in her arms, and the sheep mothers who browsed close by contentedly, knowing their unintelligent darlings were being cared for by one who had won their stupid confidence.

Many a dog Honie had rescued from being ill-treated, many a cat had she stepped in and almost literally torn from the hands of the tormentors. With her sparse pence she had compassed temporary kindness for a donkey, and it was amongst the sins treasured up by Miss Warren against her that when an old grey mare, unfit for further work at Antlet Farm, had been sold at an advantageous price to some local devil, Miss Legerton, then not far advanced in her teens, meeting the devil aforesaid, thrashing the limping mare, conducted both back to the stable-yard, and with such successful tears entreated Mr. Warren's mercy for an animal she had often fed that the purchase

money was returned, and a blessing in gold besides paid down on the spot, and the creature for the remainder of her natural life given the run of that soft paddock which shouldered the domain of Antlet Hall.

Well, and well-a-day, to give up those few pounds seemed much to Mr. Warren ; nevertheless, he had given them up cheerfully for her sake, and yet here regardless of him, his likes or his dislikings, was the ungrateful chit discoursing the knowledge she had gathered in his own fields to a new creature who would have been abhorrent to him.

So they walked on, she talking in perfect good faith, he listening with an apparent interest and absorption in the manners and habits of birds, flowers, and fishes, worthy of all commendation.

While Honie was finishing a description of the green linnet's house and appointments, delivered with her eyes well open and every

pulse in her body trying to do justice to so charming a theme, the party found themselves at the gates of Elm Vale.

"Oh! what trees," cried the girl in an ecstasy. "And, oh! oh! what lovely roses. I never saw such roses before;" and indeed the lodges were almost hidden by clusters of yellow and crimson, and damask and white, a wealth of bud and flower!

"Should you like some?" said Mr. Carder.

"Please, please do not ask for me," entreated Honoria, the while her eager eyes continued to devour the sight. "Mr. Carder, pray do not. Ah! now he has gone off to get some, and I am so sorry."

"You little stupid, it is his own place," said Clara.

"Or rather his sister's," suggested Tom.

"Well, that comes to the same thing with them, though it might not with us,"

she answered. "Just watch him. He is taking the thorns off, I declare. That must prove the prelude to some wonderfully polite speech."

But Mr. Carder made no speech—paid no compliments. He simply gave Honoria the roses, and smiled when he saw the almost childish delight with which she took them.

"We have roses at home," she said, "but none like yours; ours have, perhaps, more perfume, but they are babies in comparison to these monsters."

"For my part," observed Mr. Carder, "having some depraved tastes, I like old-fashioned flowers best. For instance, I prefer auriculas to cinerarias; and to revert to roses, I consider no garden complete unless it can reckon among its inhabitants a cabbage-rose, a York and Lancaster, the little Scotch yellow rose that delights to wander over the ground, and the great

honest white—which does its duty, etcetera, etcetera—and gladdens the eye with thousands of flowers relieved by a good background of green—flowers not to be despised by any means, as we shall find when we have lost them ; that is the sort your father encourages at Antlet Hall, I suppose.”

“At Antlet Hall ?” repeated Honoria, in a tone of inquiry.

“Can I have made a mistake ?” he said.
“Is not Antlet Hall the name of Mr. Legerton’s place ?”

Honoria hesitated. Perhaps for the time any one could have counted ten, she waited ere answering ; and yet that sixth part of a minute’s pause showed the existence of something in her character, that mother, or lover, or friend, had never suspected lay dormant. She lacked decision—the last want under heaven anybody had ever attributed to Honoria Legerton. Under her strength there lay a stratum of weak-

ness—all womanly it might be—but still weakness destined to work for her trouble and regret in the future.

Had my heroine been of the same mental constitution as Mr. Day's typical and hateful Master Sandford, she would at once have answered :

“Sir, I am thankful to say we reside no longer in that uselessly large house. We live now in a little cottage, where we are happier and better and more contented than you at Elm Vale,” but not being that prodigy of rude mental strength, she hesitated before replying,

“We are not at Antlet Hall now. We left it when I was quite a child. Papa had to sell it. He does not own the place any longer,” and, as she brought out the last few words of supererogation, Honoria felt as she had never felt previously—that she was Miss Legerton of Antlet no more—only Miss Honie of the Cottage—two very

different people in the estimation of the world.

"Sits the wind in that quarter?" thought Mr. Carder, in amazement; but he had not lived his life in vain, and so went on without a moment's delay,

"In that case, perhaps you have plenty of old-fashioned roses in your present garden. Will you tell me something about it?"

For answer, Honoria described to him how the garden was looking at that very moment. Along the myrtle hedge dividing it from the downlands over the cliffs, trailed purple passion-flowers and trumpet honeysuckles. Here was the terrace-walk, as she and her mother had christened the raised path next the shore, from which they could catch the outward-bound ships, with snow-white sails all spread, sailing away from the land some of them might never return to more.

"Do you know," said Honoria, in parenthesis, "I always wave my handkerchief when I see a vessel coming home safe?"

Over the walls of the cottage, she went on to tell him, climbed roses and honeysuckle, and there were great trees of white roses, and there was a pretty lawn at one side of the house, with a rustic seat upon it, quite shaded by the branches of a weeping ash. Further, the garden contained every old-fashioned flower he could mention, which, truth to tell, would indeed have included a very scant variety, and the place was besides noted for the size and beauty of the Portuguese laurels which shaded the house from the road.

She spoke also of the view over land and sea, along the coast and away to the distant hills, under the woods of which Antlet Hall seemed to nestle; and, in answer to some apparently careless, but really leading questions, she told him how

little her father seemed to lament the loss of his property, and how rarely her mother mentioned "The Hall."

"No, we never go there," she said, still replying to his inquiries. "I have not been inside the gates since we passed through them when I was seven years old, and I do not suppose I ever shall be. Not remember it? I could find my way blind-fold to every hole and corner in the house."

"If you two young people have finished that confidential chat," exclaimed Clara at this juncture—pausing to enable the "two young people" to overtake her and her companion—"I should like to get home and have some breakfast. Good-bye, Arthur. Good-bye for the present, Tom. Now, Honie, don't go to sleep again"—and she hurried Honoria along at a pace which promised soon to bring them to Jersey House.

"It is so dreadfully late," went on Miss

Clara Lessant, a little crossly; "it was waiting for those stupid roses threw me out. Give them to me, Honie, for a moment," and when Honoria somewhat reluctantly complied, she threw the bunch into a stream they were crossing at the time.

"Oh! Clara," cried her cousin, running down the bank in order to rescue them.

"Oh! Honoria," mimicked the other, adding, "Let them float away. I can't have them taken into the house. Mamma would want to know where they came from, and then we should have to tell her we had been out, and, as a natural consequence, there would be a pretty to-do."

"Are you not going to tell your mamma that you have been out, then?" asked Honoria.

"Most certainly not; and I shall expect you to be equally wise. Do you hear me, Honie?"

"Yes, I hear you."

"And do you mean to obey me?"

"Of course, if you wish me not to mention that we have been out, I shall say nothing about our walk, but — "

"But—but me no buts—just say in one word whether you mean to be detestable or charming—whether you are going to set yourself as a censor of things you do not understand, or to let me manage my own affairs for myself? Are we to be friends or foes?—that is all I care to know. I can shape my course accordingly."

Honoraria looked at the speaker in amazement. Clara's blue eyes were flashing, and her usually fair face was ablaze with passion—such passion, indeed, as Mrs. Legerton's darling had never before beheld alter a woman's countenance, and it frightened her accordingly.

Nevertheless, she answered with some show of bravery.

"I do not want to be any person's foe. I do not know what you mean by talking in that way, and I do not think you know yourself. Of course, I should not be so mean as to tell Mrs. Lessant anything you wished me not to mention ; but I do not think it kind or right of you, Clara, to ask me to go out with you if you knew your mamma would object to our walking in the morning."

In a moment Clara's arm was round her neck—Clara's voice purring in her ear.

" You sweet child," thus ran the argument, " you are one person and I another. You have one mamma, and I my own. You have evidently never had a lover—how should you, poor innocent darling ? In a word, Honie Legerton, you are as green as a gosling—pray do not appropriate the phrase and bring it out at our first dinner-party—and you are at the same time (emphasizing the remark with many kisses) the

nicest, dearest cousin any mortal ever met with. Do you love me, Honie?"

Now, this was a question Honoria did not feel prepared to answer with the suddenness wherewith it had been propounded. After all, at one stage of life it is almost as awkward to be asked to state off-hand whether you love a lady as a gentlemen. Nevertheless, Honie rose equal to the occasion.

"I like you very much, indeed, Clara," she said; "but I wish—I do wish you would not have any secrets from your mamma."

"Teach your grandmother!" suggested Miss Clara Lessant.

"I have not one to teach," said Honoria, with a little humorous twinkle in her eyes.

Just at that moment, the path happening to narrow, Clara stepped back to give her visitor precedence, and then, all of a sudden,

her soft affectionate accents changed once again to tones of anger.

"Honie Legerton!" she broke out, "I could find it in my heart to beat you."

"What is the matter now?" asked Honoria, facing round.

"Look at your dress—just look at your dress!"

"Well, I have looked, and what then?" said Honoria defiantly, dragging round a couple of yards of dripping wet flounce for her own inspection.

"Is there another girl on earth who would have gone scrambling through the grass on a dewy morning as you have done?"

"I do not know; but, as everything about me seems to displease you, Clara, I think I will pack up the minute I get indoors, and go home by the first train. I am not accustomed to be spoken to as if I were a child or a slave."

"Isn't it—then it shan't be scolded. It shall have its own way, and it shall get me into a nice scrape if it likes without my uttering another word of remonstrance. Why, Honie, if mamma sees that dress—"

"Don't make such a fuss about nothing," interrupted Honoria, whose naturally quick temper was now thoroughly roused; "the dress can be washed, I suppose."

"If you think it can go to the laundress without mamma knowing something of its state, you have mistaken the policy which obtains in our establishment. You must give it to me before mamma or anybody else sees its condition. I will manage the matter somehow for you."

"It seems to me you will manage the matter for yourself. Thank goodness! I do not care whether your mamma knows I went out this morning or not," and

Honoria, feeling very much as if she had sold herself into captivity, walked on in a huff, which seemed to Clara so eminently absurd that at length she burst into a ringing peal of laughter.

CHAPTER VIII.

HONORIA'S LITTLE SONG.

HIGH noon at Jersey House ; the sun blazing down upon the flower-beds and the cedar-tree ; the drawing-room windows open, the drawing-room blinds close drawn ; Mrs. Lessant writing letters, Miss Lessant in a dignified attitude surveying some lilies of the valley, which, with more or less success —less, perhaps, rather than more—she was transferring to cardboard ; Miss Beatrice at her embroidery frame, Clara yawning, Honoria cutting up scraps of woollen material for a sofa pillow.

She had begged for employment, and

Mrs. Lessant having supplied her with this, she was honestly trying to work her way through the bag of odds and ends presented for the purpose ; but already her thumb was blistered with the scissors, and she was thinking,

“ If this be pleasure, I might better have stayed at home.”

Honie previously had recovered her good temper. Her heart was not proof against Clara's apologies, and the two young ladies had “ made up friends again ” in orthodox fashion. The unfortunate dress was, thanks to “ Cousin Tom,” already in the hands of a friendly laundress. Mrs. Lessant, coming down to breakfast at half-past nine, saw nothing to excite suspicion of such an enormity as a morning walk. The household trooped in for prayers—and then trooped out again. Mrs. Lessant took her place behind the urn. Mr. Lessant looked at the newspaper, and then, having

received his tea, proceeded to the more serious business of the morning.

"Well," thought Honoria, "may he dispense with luncheon,"—and, indeed, the only wonder would have been had he felt capable of eating any.

On a conveniently adjacent plate, quite independent of the orthodox stand, lay four creamy-coloured eggs, which plate was flanked by a breakfast cup.

Into this Mr. Lessant broke three of the eggs, and, having mashed up their contents with salt, butter, and cayenne, took the produce thus manufactured down in gulps. The fourth egg he ate out of the shell ; when he had completed that course, he attacked the familiar haddock, taking a large piece of the animal at once, and when he had finished operations upon that portion, transferred without the slightest hesitation his superfluous bones back to the dish.

After that he had half-a-dozen slices of

old ham, and drank two more cups of tea, making four in all, and the whole time there was no conversation worthy the name. Miss Lessant ate dry toast; Mrs. Lessant, with her nose dilated very much as if an unsavoury odour were under it, partook of a very tiny morsel of a hot roll; Beatrice languidly allowed herself to be helped to a portion of a pie curiously compounded, whilst Clara ate her eggs and fried bacon, and helped herself to marmalade three times with an aspect of serene innocence.

There is a state and a time of life in which people not merely do not care what they eat, but have small appetite for eating anything, and the pleasures Honoria had experienced so far were certainly not connected with those of the table.

A basket of strawberries from Andlet Farm, some early vegetables, grapes and nectarines on rare occasions from the garden of the great man her father looked to for

his salary, such and such like were about the only luxuries with which Honoria was much acquainted. The kitchen-garden attached to the cottage was of such limited extent that only the commonest household necessaries were cultivated there; with the exception of a few raspberry canes, it produced nothing but what was strictly useful; and as for the raspberries—so long as there were any to gather—Honie collected them for her mother, set them about with dainty leaves, and served them on a little waiter with a modicum of cream and sugar powdered to fineness by her own loving hands.

At Antlet Farm, Mr. Warren and his sister, a lady of angular appearance and of austere habits, eat to live, they certainly did not live to eat; whilst as regarded her father, Honoria had never seen him at those feasts great folks make to do honour to themselves and friends; for all of which reasons

the breakfast table at Jersey House seemed to the girl a scene of wild and unnecessary extravagance.

"I must run away now, Mrs. L.," said the banker after he had once more returned to the charge, and eaten a couple of kidneys as an afterthought. "Anything you want from town?"

"I want some money, pa, please," observed Clara when all the other members of the family had signified an absolute immunity from requirements of any kind.

"Tut, tut, tut," answered her father. "I cannot always be bringing you money, child."

"Then I shall come for it, papa," remarked Miss Clara blandly.

"That I'll be bound you will," said Mr. Lessant, rising and looking round the table with a red kindly face, which nevertheless had a sort of want and unrest in its expression. "You have not spoken, my dear,"

he added, turning to Honoria. "Is there no little fal-lal I can bring for you; no ribbon or buckle? Have you no brooch that needs mending, no watch that requires cleaning? What! you want nothing; there is nothing I can do for you? Wonderful young lady. What a treasure your husband will find in you!"

"Don't be absurd, Robert," entreated Mrs. Lessant, with an air of lofty contempt.

"Absurd! I never was more in earnest in my life," replied the banker, with perfect good faith. "Good-bye then for the present," and Mr. Lessant departed amidst the languid indifference of all his family.

Then, at once, at least so it seemed to Honoria, Mrs. Lessant developed a sufficient appetite.

"I wish, Tom," she said, "you would cut me the thinnest slice possible of that tongue and the tiniest morsel of chicken.

I really feel, for a wonder, quite hungry this morning."

Apparently Tom had learned how to translate the Jersey House language into the accustomed vernacular, for he handed Mrs. Lessant a very well-filled plate, to which Miss Lessant and Beatrice in due time followed suit.

"My dear child," said the hostess to Honoria, "positively you have not touched a thing. Tom, what is there she would like? Perhaps you are fond of sweets. Clara, the marmalade is near you."

It was all over at last. The final cup of coffee had been poured out; the supplementary slice of toast buttered and despatched; then for nearly an hour each of the party felt free to do what she liked, at the end of which time they assembled as has been stated, in the drawing-room, each furnished with an occupation except Clara, who sat yawning in a manner suggestive to the initiated of unaccustomed early rising.

Of abnormally early rising, however, no inhabitant of Jersey House was usually guilty, and for this reason the young lady's weariness was resented more as a physical weakness than a moral crime.

"Can you find nothing to do?" asked Miss Lessant at last, raising her eyes and presenting a good front view of her Roman nose to her sister.

"No," was the answer.

"You are enough to fidget one to death," observed Miss Beatrice, looking languidly over her embroidery frame.

"Am I?"

"Clara, my dear," said Mrs. Lessant at this juncture, "can you not manage to initial *one* of those handkerchiefs this morning? I shall want them when we go to Wimledon."

"Madam, I will try," answered Clara, rising and leaving the room.

In a few minutes she returned with a

dainty work basket slung on one arm, and her right hand equipped with thimble, needle, and all the accessories of woman's charming toil.

Honorina's eyes surveyed the cambric.

"You are up in satin stitch I can see," cried Clara triumphantly, "take it and earn my eternal gratitude."

"May I? oh! may I?" said Honorina, rapturously relinquishing her scissors. "I can embroider, Mrs. Lessant, I can indeed. Please give me a morsel of common muslin that you may judge if my work is sufficiently good. Do you quite like those letters? Will you allow me to draw a design, Mrs. Lessant. Your initials are J. L., is it not so?"

"T. J. L." said Mrs. Lessant, looking up from her writing and studying the sunburnt, excited face of the speaker with an interest not totally void of contempt; "but do not trouble yourself about the handker-

chiefs, that lazy girl ought to have marked them long ago."

"But I am so fond of needlework, I do quantities of it at home," explained Honoria.

"Oh!" commented Mrs. Lessant, and the girl felt she had made a mistake, though she could not imagine how.

Mrs. Lessant resumed her letter writing. Miss Lessant sketched the outline of her lilies, and then rubbed it out again. Miss Beatrice perfected the heart of a rose with floss silk. Honoria traced out the monogram and embroidered it in satin stitch. Clara took up a book and laid it down after turning over a few pages, yawned four times in succession, then rose and, opening the piano, idly touched the keys.

"Do you play, my dear?" asked Mrs. Lessant, breaking a silence which had begun to be oppressive.

"Oh! yes," said Honoria briskly.

"And sing?" inquired Clara.

"Yes."

"Then sing something," commanded the young lady.

"If it will not tire you," added Mrs. Lessant graciously; whilst Beatrice turned her face towards Honoria with an expression which seemed to say, "Now we shall have an exhibition," and Miss Lessant, who was the musician *par excellence* of Jersey House, looked at the girl encouragingly as though to assure her, however poor her best might be, her efforts would meet with kindly toleration. Honoria moved to the piano. It was a magnificent instrument, "The best," as Mr. Lessant not unfrequently remarked "money could buy;" and the girl ran her fingers over the keys with a lingering fondness, which offered a striking contrast to the masterly precision of Miss Lessant's manipulation; then, after a minute or so, she played a little prelude softly and—sang—

I can only compare the effect produced to the bursting of a shell amongst people unprepared for its advent.

At the end of the first verse Mrs. Lessant and Miss Lessant looked at each other appalled, whilst Beatrice left her needle sticking in the canvas, and folded her white hands resignedly upon the edge of the embroidery frame.

There are different ways of singing, you have no doubt observed, my reader. There is the inoffensive warbling, as far removed from evil as from good ; the little piping songster who has generally a small crack in her voice ; the effusive amateur who seems to challenge criticism, and who behind her back receives plenty of the commodity ; the careful singer who does all she has been taught to do, but who has never compassed that which no master is able to teach ; the affected maiden who courts the sympathies of her audience, and affords amusement to a

wide circle of good-natured acquaintances ; the lady whose friends tell her she sings better than Lind ever did, and who believes them ; all these and a dozen other varieties exist, and still beyond there is a further genus—those who either are professionals or else have caught the knack of singing like professionals.

Now it was this in Honoria which frightened Mrs. Lessant. If she had seen her waltzing on stilts, or dancing like a ballet girl, she could not have been more astonished and shocked than was the case when she heard how her visitor rendered a perfectly innocent and commonplace air.

The words of the song were simple enough, though not perhaps more foolish than the words of songs usually are, yet as Honoria delivered them they attained that importance which concert singers seem able to confer on the most idiotic ballad ever penned.

"I loved, I love but once," that was the refrain of each verse, and to make as much as possible of so admirable a sentiment the composer repeated it thus,

"I loved, I love but once," which was sung softly and tenderly, and then, "I loved," with a decision intended to leave no manner of doubt about the subject, "I love," very high, "but once," and then the interlude and the song went on again. Now this refrain was the part Honoria delivered in true professional style.

Fortunately there were three not short verses, and Mrs. Lessant's nerves had consequently time to steady themselves before any remark became necessary.

"My goodness, who would have believed our country cousin could sing like that," exclaimed Clara as the last note died away. She had been staring at Honoria during the whole performance, and consequently failed to observe the looks of terror and dis-

approbation which were exchanged between her mother and sisters.

"You certainly," said the former lady, "have a good voice, my love, but if I were you I do not think I should use it much, till you have finished growing. I have no doubt if you take care of it and are able to have lessons hereafter from some good master, you will sing very nicely, very nicely indeed."

And Mrs. Lessant smiled on Honoria as if she had paid her the highest compliment, and took not the slightest outward notice of the girl's expression of blank surprise and disappointment.

Up to that moment Honoria had believed she possessed one talent; she was not vain of it, but she felt no doubt about the matter. Never before had it entered her mind that there might be two opinions on the subject. If she could do nothing else well, she could sing; hitherto that had been her

simple creed, and now in a moment the faith of half her lifetime was swept away, and she was covered with shame and mortification.

It was as though an audience had hissed an artiste posed to receive an encore. Honoria's ears tingled as if she had been dealt a sudden blow. She felt herself flush even to the roots of her hair, and yet Mrs. Lessant had praised her !

Ay, but such praise,—about as acceptable to Honoria's vanity as the embrace of a bear to a sportsman.

Miss Lessant pressed the handle of her camel-hair brush against her lips to hide the smile she could not quite suppress. Miss Beatrice took up her needle and stooped once more over her work,—satisfied. Clara glanced from her mother to her sisters, and then said *sotto voce*,

“ Well, I'm sure,” whilst Honoria remained motionless at the piano, a spectacle

of humiliation which might have moved even Mrs. Lessant to pity.

But when Mrs. Lessant had a duty to perform towards her family, she never allowed any consideration for the feelings of other people to influence her, and accordingly she dismissed the subject of Honoria's voice as if it were one which could not be of the slightest interest to any one, and went on smoothly to speak of an invitation to a party "That I ventured on your behalf to accept, Honie," she said in dulcet accents. "We are all going, and I am sure you will enjoy yourself."

What reply Honoria made to this speech, and how she passed the next five minutes, she never afterwards could precisely remember. All she knew was that she did answer, and that by some means she found herself back at the table holding a piece of cambric fine as gossamer in her trembling hands, and looking at the initials through a mist of tears.

But she worked bravely on. Her needle flew in and out, the delicate stitches grew into letters, the little dots and leaves, the sprays and tendrils with which she embellished her design, were as smooth and even as though she had formed them all with an untroubled heart.

"She is courageous," thought Mrs. Lessant, watching her struggle with a certain admiration. "She has more in her than poor Marion ever had, though she wants something the Jerseys possess."

"Let us go and have a look at the conservatory, Honie," suggested Clara at this juncture. "Put down that stupid embroidery. I am sure it is making your head ache;" and she took Honoria by the hand, and nothing loth led her out of the room.

"If that girl goes on talking about doing 'quantities of work,' our friends will fancy we have invited a young sempstress here by mistake," remarked the beautiful Miss Les-

sant the moment the door closed behind their visitor.

“What did you think of her singing, mamma ?” asked Theresa maliciously.

“It is magnificent, she has a superb voice,” answered the banker’s wife; “but she must never sing again while she is with us. A hundred affidavits would fail to convince society that she is not a public singer. Positively I tremble when I think that we might have asked her for a ballad when some one was here. How fortunate that Clara should have gone to the piano while we were quite alone ! It seems providential, does it not ? what can her mother be thinking about ! Poor Marion, she has lived so long out of the world, that perhaps the idea has never occurred to her.”

“I think,” said Miss Beatrice, “as I have always thought, that it was a mistake to ask her here. She will be an intolerable nuisance ; she has not a dress fit to go out

in, and we shall never know how many stupid remarks she makes to strangers. I cannot imagine, mamma, why you invited her. Is it quite impossible for one of us to have scarlet fever, and make that an excuse for sending her home again? I am quite willing to be taken suddenly ill if we can only get rid of her."

"She would offer to stay and nurse you, Trix," said Miss Lessant. "Now, for my part, I do not dislike the girl; she seems good-natured and industrious, and I think she speaks the truth. By way of a change, that strikes me as something pleasant."

"Honie," said Clara later in the day, going into their visitor's room, while she was writing to her mother, "just attend to me for a minute, please. I have something delicious to tell you."

"What is it?" asked Honoria.

"I am on no account to ask you to sing again. I have been threatened with all sorts

of pains and penalties if I ever say you can sing to any one. A fiction has been concocted about your health, and we have all agreed to swear to it as a fact. The end justifies the means, and it has been decided that you are not to be allowed to sing on any pretence whatsoever."

"I never thought I sang badly until to-day."

"Badly! If you sang badly we should be all delighted to hear you. No, you sing far too well. You should have seen mamma's face of pious horror when she said, "Now, Clara, remember I command you never to ask Honoria to touch the piano. She sings and plays just like a professional person. It would simply ruin us to have that sort of talk set afloat. You know there are plenty of people who would be only too delighted to be able to start such a piece of scandal, and it would be said directly that Miss Legerton was on the stage.'"

"Do I sing as if I were?" asked Honoria.

"Of course you do, just like the people who come down here in our season, which I suppose is out of the London season, and give concerts, only you sing a great deal better than any of them that I ever heard. Are you quite sure, Honie, you are our cousin and not a metropolitan star?"

"Now, I wonder," said Honoria softly.

"What do you wonder?"

"Nothing of much consequence," was the answer.

"I must run away now," remarked Clara. "I am very late; but I could not resist telling you how you have shocked all the proprieties of Jersey House. You ought to be greatly obliged to me, I think."

"I am indeed greatly obliged to you."

"And it will make everything so much easier, since otherwise you might have wondered why I never asked you to sing."

"Possibly I might."

" You must never tell any one, remember,
or I shall get into trouble."

" I am not at all likely to tell any one."

" That is a dear girl ; good-bye for the
present," and Clara hurried away.

" Now, I wonder," said Honoria after she
had closed and bolted the door, recom-
mencing the argument broken off a few
minutes previously, " if that is the reason
why Mr. Warren dislikes to hear me sing.
It is curious two such different people as he
and Mrs. Lessant should be of one mind.
If he only could be transplanted to Dilfield,
how glad I should feel to be at home
again ! "

END OF VOL. I.

